For the Potions Master's Amusement

Summary

Severus Snape is not a kind man, but Hermione Granger is past caring. She wants his approval and will do anything to get it. How far will she go? Even she has no concept of the depths to which she will fall in her quest. Seventh year AU student/teacher.

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Chapter 1: The Humiliation of Miss Hermione Granger

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The basement kitchen at Grimmauld Place was dark in the way only a windowless, underground room in the dark of night can be: absolutely. The silence was total, as well, save for her own breathing, but Hermione scarcely counted that. It might be quiet now, but she was sure she had heard a sound—that it had woken her from her sleep—and she had come downstairs to investigate. The boys were at the Burrow, the Order were out and about their business, and on this night only Hermione and Arabella Figg occupied the Black house, its rooms chilly even in August. Tomorrow, Hermione would journey on to Ottery St Catchpole; tomorrow, Arabella Figg would return to Little Whinging. But for tonight, they were two women alone in the great old house, and Hermione was quite sure she had heard a noise in the cellar.

Standing in the doorway, Hermione held her breath and listened. It might be nothing more than Crookshanks chasing a mouse or Kreacher lurking beneath his dresser in the boiler room—but Hermione did not care to leave it to chance. The war was on, this summer after her sixth year at school; Lord Voldemort’s Death Eaters were abroad, even in daylight, wreaking havoc—they would certainly not hesitate to invade the headquarters of the Order of the Phoenix if they could manage it.

But she heard nothing, save the pounding of her heart in her ears.

She slipped her fingers up her sleeve, meaning to draw her wand and light the gas lamp—but she was suddenly and inexplicably pressed to the wall. The unmistakeable tip of a wand thrust roughly beneath her chin, forcing her head back, even as a large body trapped her against the wall and a gloved hand covered her mouth. Instinctively, Hermione raised her knee sharply, seeking to disable her captor, and she continued to scramble for her wand.

‘Fuck,’ an angry voice grated, and the body twisted against her, a sharp hip slamming against her, knocking her head against the wall as a brutal grip about her wrist foiled her attempts to reach her wand. ‘Be still!’

Her head hurt; she knew she would have a goose egg beneath her hair. Still, she parted her lips and bit the palm of the hand over her mouth as hard as she could.

‘Bloody fucking hell!’ the voice swore, and her wand was ripped from her sleeve. She heard it strike the wall across the room as she was pushed to the floor on her face with a heavy body straddling her.
Hermione bucked against the weight, trying desperately to dislodge her attacker. Suddenly, light flooded the kitchen, and she blinked against the unexpected illumination.

‘Granger! I might have known!’

The weight was then gone from her back, and Hermione launched herself up and away, desperately looking about for her wand.

‘Are you looking for this?’

She turned wildly, ready to fight, to bite and claw, if necessary—but it was only Professor Snape, her Potions teacher, standing beyond her reach, his wand held at his side, pointing at the floor, whilst her own vine wood wand dangled from the fingertips of his other hand.

‘P-professor!’ she gasped.

‘Take it, stupid girl!’ he spat at her, and Hermione scurried forward to retrieve her wand from him.

‘But sir—what are you doing here?’ she asked. Snape wasn’t supposed to be in town—she had heard Mundungus Fletcher whisper as much to Mrs Figg the night before. He was spending the summer with …

Snape tucked his wand away and peeled the glove from his injured hand, revealing the clear indentation of her teeth marks across the palm of his hand.

‘Oh, sir!’ she cried, grasping the injured hand to look it over more carefully. ‘I’m so sorry, but you ought not to have been skulking about in the dark!’

Snape snatched his hand from her with a hiss, whether of pain or disgust she could not tell. ‘Go to your room!’ he snapped at her, turning away and moving to the counter, snatching open the door of the cupboard above it.
'If you’re looking for first aid supplies, they aren’t kept there anymore,’ she said. ‘I rearranged in here.’

‘I suppose you also *rearranged* the location of the fucking gas lamp,’ he snarled, slamming the cupboard door closed and wrenching open the one next to it.

‘Yes, I did move it,’ she admitted. ‘Of course, I had no way of knowing you would be back from Volde—’

He spun where he stood, his face twisted into a mad, nearly inhuman mask of fury and hatred. ‘Shut up!’ he thundered at her. ‘Do *not* speak his name!’

The injured hand was no longer nursed to his chest but now clutched his left forearm, where Hermione knew the Dark Mark was burnt into his flesh. Dimly, she wondered if it hurt him when someone spoke Voldemort’s name aloud. Disregarding his peremptory commands, she walked past him to the dresser, and opening the bottom drawer, she withdrew a box of first aid supplies.

‘If you will sit, sir, I will clean your wound,’ she said, moving to the kitchen table and placing the box upon it.

‘If you will get the hell out, I will attend to it myself,’ he replied without looking at her.

Hermione watched him, standing across from her with his face averted, his attention on his bitten hand. His greasy black hair hung about his face, obscuring it. He wore a black travelling cloak, still fastened over his clothing, and she could see his customary black trousers over his black boots. He looked as if he had come a long way.

‘Please, sir,’ she coaxed, as she might with one of her recalcitrant male friends. ‘Let me help you.’

His black eyes were then upon her, burning with dislike and disdain, and she quailed, stepping back from him as if struck. ‘You have *helped* me quite enough for one day, idiot girl!’ he hissed. ‘Get out! Don’t I have to put up with you enough during term time? I ought not to be troubled with you now! Out!’

Hermione swallowed her fear, watching as he staggered over and collapsed into one of the chairs. He seemed truly unwell—he ought to permit her to …
He jerked the box toward him, ignoring her as if she were not present in the room. He murmured a cleansing spell over the bite, then withdrew a bottle of the essence of dittany, spelling the cork from the bottle. She approached slowing and quietly, as if attempting not to frighten a tiger in the wild. His face was bent over his arm, and she saw the concentration he focussed on the task, as he looked when marking essays at his desk in the dungeon Potions classroom. She had covertly watched him at it more than once, wondering what she would have to do to earn his approval …

‘Granger.’

She froze, and he looked up from his task, his empty black eyes boring into hers.

‘Granger, get out. I neither need nor desire your assistance, much less your company.’ He spoke the last word as if it were meant as an affront.

‘You needn’t be insulting!’ she cried indignantly. ‘I only want to help!’

‘Yet I have repeatedly spurned your offers of help, have I not?’ he inquired softly, menacingly, turning his eyes from her dismissively.

‘But I …’ she began, only to have him cut across her yet again.

‘Using your pure-white hands to administer first aid to the injury you gave me will not increase my regard for you,’ he said cuttingly. ‘I am not impressed with you, stupid girl, and I am never likely to change.’ He completed the application and dittany and began to bind the hand with white gauze. ‘Go. Away.’

He was distraught—he must be hungry and tired—he couldn’t possibly really mean what he was saying to her. She took another step towards him. ‘I could fix something for you to eat,’ she said in her coaxing tone. ‘I could make sure the bed in your room is made up …’

With a non-verbal spell, he sent the box of first aid supplies floating to the dresser, where the drawer opened to receive them, then closed gently and finally.

‘Do you know what your problem is, Granger?’ he inquired, removing a flask from the pocket of his
cloak and taking a long pull from its contents. ‘Your problem is that you think you know better than me, even as I am explicitly telling you what I want for you to do.’

Hermione stopped within an arm’s reach of him, her brow furrowed in thought. ‘You’re implying that I don’t listen to you!’ she accused.

‘It’s not an implication,’ he replied. ‘You don’t listen to anyone. Only Hermione Granger knows what is best to do in any situation, big or small.’ He sneered at her. ‘Arrogant, headstrong, and foolhardy—the symbol of your House, as it were.’ And he tipped the flask to his lips, the spirits he consumed burning her eyes with the strength of their vapours.

‘No one—no teacher—has ever said that about me!’ she objected hotly.

His thin, cruel lips curved into an unpleasant smile. ‘None of your other teachers see you for what you really are,’ he said silkily. ‘Mundane, pedestrian—nothing but a memorising, word-spouting popinjay with no real talent and less character.’ His voice dropped even further, and his insolent eyes raked her from head to toe. ‘I see you, Granger. You’ll never fool me.’

Instinctively, Hermione crossed her arms over her chest, suddenly mindful of her nightdress and her loosely belted dressing gown. His bark of laughter startled her, and when he stood from the table, she fell back a step.

‘Don’t flatter yourself,’ he sneered. ‘As little as I am interested in your so-called intellectual powers, Granger, even less am I impressed by your non-existent feminine wiles.’

She burned beneath the scourge of his brutal disdain. ‘I’m not without talent!’ she cried, near tears.

His merciless black gaze burned through her. ‘Would you like to have the opportunity to prove it?’ he asked dangerously.

Hermione swallowed, feeling her heart fluttering in her chest like a hummingbird at an orchid. What would he ask her to do? Solve a logic puzzle, like the one he had written to protect the Philosopher’s Stone? Recite one of the Laws of Magic? Brew a complex potion?

He crossed his arms over his chest as he waited for her response, and she noted the breadth of his shoulders over his slim hips, his lithe grace proclaimed by his very posture. He had looked her over
with a sneer on his face, but she was a young woman, and he was a … a man. Perhaps he would ask some other sort of proof altogether …

‘Well?’ he demanded. ‘It’s not as if you could succeed at what I will ask.’

She took an impetuous step towards him. ‘I can! I will!’

He stepped forward and his thin, pitiless fingers dug into her shoulders. ‘Then do not move,’ he said. ‘Stand here, in exactly this attitude, until I tell you to move. Show that you are capable of understanding and following instructions.’

She opened her lips to object. Stand in the cold, dark kitchen all night? In her nightdress? What did that have to do with proving her talents?

‘And do it silently,’ he added, as if tightening a noose about her neck.

Hermione slowly closed her mouth, looking up into his thin, sallow face, wondering how it had come about that she had left her warm, welcoming bed to creep down into the basement in the dead of night and be challenged by the most provoking man she knew to remain here all night. His fingers were unkind as they dug into the flesh of her shoulders; his hair was oily, stringy, and unclean as it hung about his disagreeable face; and his crooked, yellow teeth were horrid to this daughter of dentists, even as he bared them at her. Why in the world would she care what he thought?

‘Blink once for “yes”,’ he told her, his Firewhisky scented breath hot on her face.

And she did.

He extinguished the gas lamp before striding out without another glance as her, and she could hear his repeated snorts of laughter until he climbed so far up into the house that distance alone hid his amusement from her. She stood where he had left her, determination holding her rigidly in place. Why hadn’t she thought to visit the loo before coming down here? Well, she wouldn’t think about needing a pee. Going to the bathroom would invalidate her response to his challenge, and she was determined not to do that. This was her chance to impress him—to prove something to him—and she would take that opportunity and use it. Every teacher she had ever had, magical or Muggle, had praised Hermione Granger for her work, her attitude, and her acumen. Who was Severus Snape to deny her what was her due?
He doesn’t think it’s your due, the critic in her mind pointed out. He thinks you’re nothing but a sycophant and a memoriser of facts, with no true understanding of application—he thinks you’re mundane and pedestrian.

Mundane! That was the epithet Professor Trelawney had used for her. She would prove him wrong!

Her bladder ached.

She would prove him wrong, no matter what it took.

Standing where he had left her, with one foot slightly in front of the other, she began to recite in her mind the twelve uses of dragon blood.

She held out for three hours before her bladder would hold no more, and she cringed with shame and mortification as the hot, acrid liquid first trickled, then flowed down her legs, wetting her clothing, soaking her socks, and creating a puddle upon the kitchen floor.

She was dozing on her feet when he swept into the kitchen the next morning, freshly showered and shaved, his still damp hair combed straight back from his forehead. She fluttered to awareness, desperate to turn away from him in her humiliation but equally desperate to stand her ground until he spoke words of approval.

‘Oh my,’ he said, staring at the spot she had occupied for the last interminable hours, seeming to relish the puddle of urine there. ‘I didn’t think you would actually do it, Miss Granger—did you honestly think I cared whether or not you stood here all night?’ He sneered at her. ‘You had best go wash, hadn’t you? I’ve been in public loos that smelt better.’

And without another word he swept out of the room and out of the house, leaving her standing in her degradation and rage. It was not until she heard the front door slam behind him that she moved from the spot, her feet squelching disgustingly in her urine-soaked socks with every step she took.
Chapter 1: The Humiliation of Miss Hermione Granger

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Chapter 2: The Infraction

The door slammed, and Hermione disciplined herself not to cower from him. His office remained, as ever, a repulsive place, the walls lined with shelves of glass containers in which horrid things floated in coloured potions. Unable to look at the revolting specimen jars, yet daring not to look into the very angry Potions master’s face, she stared at the stone floor and berated herself for what had seemed like a reasonable idea at the time …

‘Well?’

His voice was icy and cutting, flaying her where she stood.

‘Sir?’ she said, her eyes still averted.

‘What do you mean by it, Granger?’ he demanded, suddenly directly behind her.

Hermione shivered, an odd, fluttering sensation which shuddered through her body, bringing her nipples to inexplicable, aching peaks and flooding her core with heat. Sweet Merlin, how she had wanted this feeling.

‘Do you mean to answer me soon, or will I be handing you over to your Head of House for discipline?’

The threat whipped across her consciousness with the worst of punishments: To be sent from his presence.

‘I’ll do whatever you want, sir,’ she said.

She was painfully aware of him behind her, heat emanating from his body as he loomed above her. She closed her eyes, savouring the feeling. *What’s the matter with me?*

His next words were spoken with his lips so close to her ear that her hair danced against her cheek.

‘Be very careful how you formulate your thoughts with me, Granger,’ he said silkily. ‘I may take you very much at your word.’

She shuddered again, this time, unable to suppress the tiny whimper and shiver which accompanied her reaction. Why couldn’t she *stop* feeling this way about him? Ever since that night at headquarters … but it was not as if she had derived any satisfaction from humiliating herself that way. He had never acknowledged it. Term had been ongoing now for three weeks, and she had not seen so much as *one* indication from him that he was even aware that they had shared a very personal conversation together.

She was aware of him moving away as a flower knows when the sun has gone behind a cloud, the sudden absence of warmth leaving her yearning. He navigated without so much as brushing against
her with the whisper of his teaching robes and took his place behind his desk, his erect posture as unforgiving as the straight wooden chair in which he sat.

‘You will now enlighten me, Granger, as to the reason for your abysmal performance in my classroom today,’ he said coldly.

Hermione felt a scrabbling of fear. Why had she done this? He was not likely to be satisfied with any story she concocted to explain herself. She closed her eyes against the rising tide of panic, wishing the dungeon floor would open and allow her to fall into an oubliette. It would be preferable to the ignominy she was likely to suffer in retaliation for her actions.

‘You will also look at me when I am speaking to you, girl,’ he added waspishly.

Hermione swallowed and raised her eyes to his face. His nostrils were flared, as if in particular disapprobation for her current transgression, and his cruel lips were pressed into a thin, white line. There was not a touch of humanity in his bearing—what had she done? She opened her mouth to speak, rapidly cobbling together a story involving a chapter unread, incomplete homework—although the completed assignment rested even now in her book bag—and a lack of sleep.

His black eyes glittered menacingly, and he raised his hand to stop her from speaking. ‘Do not,’ he hissed, ‘attempt to lie to me, Granger. Believe me, it would be fatal.’

Her mouth went completely dry then. Fatal?

He slapped the desktop with the flat of his hand, the crack of noise making her jump as if she were guilty of something. ‘Answer me!’ he ordered her.

‘I—’ she began.

And he was on his feet again, rounding the desk. ‘I know for a fact that you read the entire book before term began,’ he said, his voice low and vibrating with an emotion Hermione could only identify as dangerous. ‘I also know for a fact that your completed assignment is in your bag.’ He stopped directly in front of her. ‘I also know—for a fact—that you are perfectly capable of understanding and following directions.’ For the slightest instant, his eyes raked down her body in the school uniform, then rested again on her face. ‘Don’t I, Hermione?’

Having him so near threw her into complete confusion. She had spent hours thinking of him being near to her—hours with her fingers busy between her legs, her other hand twisting and pulling at her nipples as she drove herself to orgasm, fantasising about his voice and his hands and his wretched, ugly face—and dear God, now he was saying her name, and it sounded like his tongue would feel on her …

His voice was a whisper, compelling, insistent. ‘Tell. Me. Now.’

‘I did it on purpose,’ she exclaimed, horrified at herself but unable to prevent the words he commanded her to utter from spilling from her mouth. ‘I knew what would happen if I put the armadillo bile in at that juncture in the brewing.’

He showed reaction to her words in neither his expression or his voice. ‘You knew there would be an explosion resulting in the melting of your cauldron and the scorching of the work table?’

‘Yes, sir,’ she whispered.
His face was inscrutable, his glittering eyes studying her with dispassionate interest. ‘What did you imagine would be the outcome of this ploy?’ he inquired evenly.

‘You would pay attention to me,’ she blurted, the words themselves drawing a throb from her aching, needy core.

Several beats passed as she waited for his response, trying with all her might not to twist and turn like an insect pinned to his specimen board. Why had he forced her to tell him if he did not mean to do something?

She shifted nervously from foot to foot, her anxiety building, laced with embarrassment and shame. Why did she feel this way about him? When had it started? Certainly before the night in the Grimmauld Place kitchen—he had needled her expertly, as he had always done—but she was the one who had pushed back, pushed for some sort of acknowledgment from him. Why did she need it so badly?

The clock above the mantelpiece ticked the seconds away, and still Professor Snape watched her. She was not sure how much time had passed with him standing implacably before her, holding her immobile with the force of his pitiless gaze, but finally, she could bear it no longer.

‘Please, sir,’ she pled, sinking to her trembling knees, not even knowing what she was asking for … but he seemed to know.

‘Good girl,’ he said, and a lump rose in her throat. ‘You will be required to follow instructions implicitly and without question,’ he stated flatly.

Hermione gaped up at him, unbidden tears wetting her lashes as her heart tripped suddenly into an erratic, racing rhythm. ‘Of course I will,’ she said, finding it difficult to speak past the pain in her throat, her voice sounding gruff to her ears.

On the blank stretch of wall behind his desk, a doorway appeared, momentarily limned in green light. He had not moved, had not so much as moved his endless black eyes from her face, but the door behind his desk opened on a room filled with shimmering light.

‘Enter, if you choose,’ he said, and it seemed to Hermione that his long, slender body was taut with the tension of anticipation, almost as if he did not already know what her response to his invitation would be.

But she stood on her unsteady legs and staggered past him and around the desk. As she passed him, he released the breath he had been holding with an audible gasp, and there was a palpable relaxation in his bearing as he followed her through the doorway—into what, she did not know.
Chapter 3 - The Punishment of Miss Hermione Granger

The room shimmered in green light, and as she moved further into it, she could see why. One wall was all of glass, and the late afternoon September sun shone dimly through the water of the lake, providing the room’s only illumination. She had heard that the Slytherin common room was beneath the lake; so, apparently was the professor’s … study? Sitting room? The other three walls were floor-to-ceiling books, save for the space occupied by a large hearth; upon the floor, thick old oriental rugs in shades of green and blue covered the ancient stone. A highly polished table, scattered now with parchment and open books, was situated to one side of the room, while a sofa upholstered in cobalt blue sat before the glass wall, with matching armchairs facing.

The professor swept past her, shedding his robes as he went. He tossed the robes onto one of the blue chairs and began to unfasten the buttons of his severe black coat, his glittering eyes fastened upon her face.

‘You enter this room of your own free will?’ he asked her, his voice low-pitched yet resonant.

‘Yes, sir,’ Hermione answered, the trembling in her limbs made no better by the sight of her Potions master unbuttoning his clothes. What would he do to her? What would he expect of her?

He shrugged out of his coat and draped it over the back of the chair, facing her now in a white linen shirt, tucked into slim black trousers. She had never seen him in so few layers. Avidly, knowing she was staring but past caring, her eyes roamed his body, noting the black leather belt cinched about his trousers. She was almost sorry he had not continued to disrobe.

‘In this room, Hermione, you will never speak unless spoken to,’ he said quietly, and her eyes returned to his face, searching there for some indication of his mood, but there was none. His expression was impassive; only his voice denoted the difference of this situation: It was unsneering, something she had rarely heard from him.

‘Yes, sir,’ she said, hoping she would remember.

‘In this room, you will do as you are told without question.’

She swallowed, a faint voice in the back of her mind questioning, not for the first time, the wisdom of this course of action. ‘Yes, sir.’

‘In this room, you will receive the … discipline you so sorely need.’ His voice caressed the word ‘discipline’, and it reverberated in her mind even as his glittering black eyes sharpened. ‘Do you agree to these terms?’

‘Yes, sir,’ she said, the pool of need seeming to become larger and deeper, lapping at the shores of her good sense, but separated by the banks of need which dictated her actions these days.

‘Good girl,’ he murmured, and her felt a throb of want so acute that she gasped.

He did not comment, although she knew he had heard her. In this room, his attention was centred on her completely, and although she was unsure of his plans for her, she thrilled to be the focus of his thoughts. It some ways, it was far more exciting that any fumbling kiss she had ever endured from the boys she knew.

He turned from her to move to the sofa, where he seated himself in the middle. ‘Come to me, Hermione,’ he said, his burning gaze compelling her to obey.
She walked to stand before him.

‘Bad girls who deliberately create havoc in my classroom deserve to be punished, do they not?’ he inquired softly, his expression stern.

‘Y-y-yes, sir,’ Hermione responded, wishing he would stop looking at her and do something.

‘You will receive a spanking,’ he informed her. ‘Place yourself across my knee.’

‘I—’ she began, but he did not permit her to continue.

‘Now is not the time for talk,’ he snapped. ‘Do as you’re told.’

So Hermione awkwardly draped herself across his lap, one arm and one leg dangling off the sofa. She had never felt so embarrassed in all her life. He was going to spank her? Like a little girl? Why?

He scooped her more completely into his lap with an arm about her torso, then tossed her grey school uniform skirt up, revealing her knickers. Dear Merlin, which ones had she worn? It wasn’t as if she had planned to show her underpants to any of her teachers when she was dressing that morning …

Her train of thought was disrupted when Professor Snape’s fingers hooked into the elastic at the top of her knickers and began to unceremoniously tug them down. Instinctively, Hermione began to struggle, but a stinging slap to her bare thigh made her go still again, and the tugging on her knickers continued until they were pushed almost to her knees. Panicked and simultaneously turned on, she squeezed her legs together, hoping he was unable to see her labia. Oh, this was not at all what she had bargained for!

In the next moment, what parts of her body he could see was the last thing on her mind.

His large, long fingered hand struck her bottom with an impact which rang through the room, and she cried out indignantly. Pinning her to his thighs with his right arm, he took no notice of her cries, but slapped her arse again, the force of the blow wringing another exclamation of pain from her—and oddly, making the ache in her core more acute, still. Hermione struggled against his iron grip, flailing her legs for additional momentum, and he directed two punishing slaps to the legs, until they were still. Then he went back to spanking her arse cheeks, alternating his blows from side to side, but unrelenting in the frequency and force of them. She was shocked and pained first to silence, then to tears. This wasn’t sexual, and oh yes, she had wanted something sexual from him. She had hoped for a demand of a shag to punish her, not for her bare bum to be spanked, as if she were a recalcitrant three-year-old.

‘Stop!’ she sobbed, mortified as much by her arousal as by her naked bottom and his painful blows to her naked flesh.

She felt him shift, his torso leaning over hers, although the rhythm of his hand never ceased. ‘You don’t want me to stop,’ he rumbled in her ear. ‘You want this—you need this.’

Now the power behind his slaps increased; he was hitting her even harder and with increased frequency, until it felt like her entire backside was on fire … as did her molten quim. Would it never end?

‘Girls who deliberately create trouble in my classroom deserve to be punished, don’t they, Hermione?’ he asked, sounding very slightly winded by his exertions.

She sobbed louder, the actual pain of the spanking breaking down her inhibitions until she cried
outright, somehow releasing all of her anger, her frustration, and the destructive energy which had been furling in her. The tears falling from her face onto the sofa cushions carried with them her resistance and her pride, leaving her empty of emotion, a being subsisting only on sensation.

At last the merciless rain of blows upon her bottom ceased, and there was only the sound of her soft sobbing and his breathing. She felt his hand at her knee, as if he were moving her knickers again, and his voice, warm and vibrant, filled her consciousness.

‘Your knickers are damp, Hermione,’ he said, his tone reproving. ‘I smelled you when I pulled them down, but I dismissed it; after all, you might have been carrying on with some boy in the hallway when no one was watching—were you?’

‘N-no,’ Hermione choked out, her sobbing beginning to calm in the absence of pain.

As if she had not answered, he continued, ‘Because the smell increased as I punished you … I can smell your arousal, Hermione.’

The hand which had lately delivered punishment to her bum now began to stroke the burning flesh of her bottom, and she clenched her eyes shut, mortified at his words—mostly because she knew it was true.

He leant over her again, his voice close to her ear. ‘What kind of girl becomes aroused when her teacher disciplines her, Hermione?’ he murmured. ‘Answer me.’

‘I d-don’t kn-know,’ she stuttered, squirming inside with shame.

‘I’ll tell you,’ he continued, the hand caressing her bum now stroking down the curve of her buttocks to her upper thighs, deliberately avoiding the damp, aching spot between them. ‘A girl who becomes aroused when her teacher spanks her bare bottom is a slut.’

Torn between disgrace at this designation, which she felt to be completely true, and the pleasure of his stroking hand, she simply took a sobbing breath.

‘Say it, Hermione,’ he encouraged, the tips of his fingers moving ever closer to the aching slickness of her quim. ‘Say it, and I will reward you.’

‘Slut,’ she whispered, trying to move beneath his fingers, to get the fingers to the spot that so longed to be touched—but he held her immobile with the arm pinning her to his lap.

‘That’s right,’ he encouraged, his teasing fingers dancing now between her upper thighs, encountering the dampness from her needful centre. ‘Say what you are, Hermione,’ he commanded.

He flattened his fingers against her quim, and she pushed against his hand, blunting, ‘I’m a slut!’

He rewarded her by dipping his finger between her slick folds, and she moaned loudly. ‘What do you want, Hermione?’ he whispered.

‘Please,’ she said, needing his ministrations desperately.

‘Please what?’ he crooned, keeping the fingers in her quim completely still.

‘Please touch me!’ she cried, bereft of all dignity.

‘If you insist,’ he murmured, and he shifted his position again, no longer leaning over her. Unerringly, his fingertips found her clitoris, and he stroked her there. ‘Like this?’ he asked, the arm
which had held her trapped now moving, that hand stroking her abused buttocks.

‘Yes!’ she cried, able now to move, and she writhed on his fingers, trying for more sensation, more, more, more …

‘These are in the way,’ he said, and although he did not speak an incantation, her knickers Vanished, and she immediately spread her legs farther apart, granting him more access to her nether parts, desperately hoping he would stop teasing and make it stop aching so badly.

‘Good girl,’ he approved, and she whimpered in response as the hand upon her bottom slid farther down, to slip two fingers inside her body, and the hand already between her folds began to rub very satisfying circles upon her clitoris. She moved with the fingers, unashamedly taking her pleasure from his clever hands, the simultaneous clitoris stroking and finger fucking bringing her swiftly to a sight-dimming, shouting climax.

The tremors wracking violently through her body continued for longer than any orgasm she had ever before experienced, until she was no longer entirely present, but drifting muzzily in a warm, safe, happy place.

When she came back to herself, she was wrapped in an emerald green blanket and held securely in her professor’s arms, her cheek upon his shoulder. She was upright and seated in his lap, being held. Dear Merlin, how she loved the sensation. Would he do it to her again if she asked? Could they skip the spanking and move straight to the fingering?

When he noticed her open eyes, he looked impassively down into her face. ‘Are you all right?’ he inquired evenly.

‘Yes,’ she responded. ‘Thank you,’ she added inanely. How many people would thank someone for spanning their arse?

He inclined his head slightly, accepting his due. ‘You needed it,’ he said.

Hermione felt her face flush a burning red. He was right, of course. She had need it—needed all of it. Decent girls didn’t need to be spanked and humiliated, did they? What was wrong with her?

‘Can I … can I do something for you?’ she offered. He had got her off quite nicely, but she hadn’t laid a finger on him. Perhaps she could put her hand down his trousers and return the favour—or he could fuck her, if he wanted; it wasn’t as if it would be her first time.

He did not answer her. ‘You need to be punished; I provide the discipline. Do not confuse the interactions with … something else.’

Hermione bit her lip and stared down at the blanket swaddling her. He didn’t want her, except to slap her bum.

‘It’s dinner time,’ he announced, and she realised the shimmering green light was gone, replaced by candlelight. It had grown dark whilst she had been in his study. ‘Can you stand?’

Hermione nodded, and Professor Snape assisted her to her feet, standing and removing the blanket as if he were a gentleman removing a lady’s wrap at a formal ball. She stood beside him clothed except for her Vanished knickers. He stepped back from her, putting distance between them.

‘If you are again in need, you may inform me by coming to this room and standing, without speaking, with your skirt raised up so I can see your naked cunt. You are never again to wear
knickers into my presence in this room. Do you understand me?’

Hermione looked at him, standing just out of arm’s reach, his expression harsh, his words strict and unyielding. His oily black hair hung in curtains on either side of his thin, sallow face, and he did not look at all as if he had whispered filthy words to her and plucked at her clitoris until she came, screaming, across his lap. He looked, in fact, exactly like her austere Potions master.

‘Yes, sir; I understand you,’ she said obediently.

He looked at her for another minute, the seconds creeping by as he studied her. At last he turned away, breaking the spell which had held her still and quiet as he looked her over. Hermione began to tuck her shirt back into her skirt, looking up only when he stopped across the room and spoke to her again.

‘You will find a jar of oil on the table,’ he said, and following his gaze, she did indeed see a brown glass container on the edge of the table. ‘You will put the entire contents of the jar into your bath to alleviate current and prevent tomorrow’s discomfort.’

She crossed the room and took the jar.

‘Do you have any questions about how to use the oil?’ he asked her curtly.

Hermione mutely shook her head, easing one step further away from him, towards the door.

‘Then you are dismissed,’ he said, and he turned to the bookshelf directly behind him, taking down a green leather volume and beginning to peruse it, effectively shutting her out even before she closed the door behind her retreat.
Chapter 4: Coming Again

For the Potions Master’s Amusement

Chapter 4: Coming Again

Hermione stood in the chilly, dark hallway outside Professor Snape’s office, her fight or flight instincts trilling through her body like a Muggle house alarm. Three weeks it had been since she had received her professor’s particular attentions—three weeks in which he had shown her no more notice than he had at any other time since she had been his student. By not so much as a glance or a word had he betrayed to her that he even recalled using the fingers of both hands to bring to her an orgasm so strong that she very nearly lost consciousness—certainly she had enjoyed a bit of a break with reality in the wake of the shuddering pleasure which had wracked her body almost to the point of pain.

She had tried not to return to him, not to think about it, not to frig herself night after night, desperate to go back to that place of erotic bliss to which he had sent her—but to no avail. Not all of her imaginings, nor her own two hands, nor the naughty toys she had ordered discreetly delivered in plain brown papers—her favourite of which was the wonder called Number Fourteen—had replaced the emotional impact of his merciless hand upon her bare arse, followed by his ingenious fingers upon her clitoris.

She clenched her fists at her sides and leant her head against the office door, gritting her teeth against the adrenaline rush. She could go back to her room—there would be no objection if she did, after all, with the glaring exception of her aching quim—and get on with her usual Friday night after-dinner activities. Well, they were pretty much the same as on any other night, although she might read a bit for pleasure before locking her door and spreading her legs to fuck herself, her mind full of his intense, inexplicable concentration upon her and her alone …

The office door opened, and she stumbled inside, her heart in her throat. Damn it all, she wasn’t ready yet to see him—to speak to him—she hadn’t had time to compose herself, to prepare her speech! But as she gained her footing again, she saw that she was alone with the glass jar menagerie; the object of her obsession was nowhere to be seen.

Then who had opened the door?

Nervously, she spun around, looking into each corner of the room, but she did not see another person. Curious, wasn’t it?
She walked around his desk, inspecting the solid-appearing wall behind it. She reached out to trace a finger along the stone, feeling for the crevice of a doorjamb, and at her touch, the doorway glowed green and the door appeared.

Hermione jerked her hand away as if she had been burned and took a step back. She did not believe for a moment that a wizard as cautious and alert as Professor Snape went about leaving his office open for a casual intruder to gain entrance, so had he made special accommodation for her? The thought warmed her and brought a tiny curve to her lips.

Scarcely had she had time to consider the ramifications of her thought before the secret doorway swung open, and the welcoming glow of a roaring fire, supplemented by the gas lamp hanging from the ceiling, bathed her in golden light. Off to the left side she saw him sitting at the table which before had been covered with books and parchment; this time, it held a single book, an ink bottle and a wineglass. Bent over the book, his quill scratching, was her professor. It was well after dinner time, and he was attired in dark slacks and boots, as usual, but he wore a forest green jumper, which struck her as quite unusual—she had never seen him wear colour before. His hanging hair obscured her view of his face, but it did not prevent her from trying to see his expression. It wasn’t too late—she wasn’t inside the room, was she? She could still flee, if she wanted …

‘Either come in or go away,’ he said without looking up.

His voice held neither rancour nor censure, and she was emboldened to enter the room in which she had promised to do as she was told without question. The door snapped closed behind her, and she was unnerved to hear a sound like a key turning in a lock. She swallowed nervously and wrung her hands.

Professor Snape continued to write in the book, occasionally dipping his quill into the ink bottle, his hand moving steadily across the page. His hair looked clean—possibly still damp—and there was a relaxation in his bearing that was unfamiliar to her. Her eyes strayed to the glass wall, but it was utterly black beyond the glass, which reflected now the candlelight and the shadowy shapes of the objects in the room.

‘Well, Miss Granger,’ he said at length, placing his quill upon the tabletop, at a precise angle to the book.

Hermione started, jerking her eyes back to him, her heart tripping into double time.

‘You do not appear to have business in this room, and I am very much afraid I do not offer office hours at—’ he glanced at the ticking clock upon the mantelpiece ‘half-past eight on Friday evenings.’
He now looked at her, his gaze calm but implacable. ‘I will bid you good evening.’

‘But you said—’ she began breathlessly, her unacknowledged hope plunging into the roiling acid in her stomach. He was going to send her away!

Deliberately, his gaze travelled from the top her head to her feet before coming to rest upon her face. ‘As I said, you do not appear to have a reason even to be in this room. You may go back to wherever you came from and leave me in peace.’ He sneered at her then, something he had not done in some time, and she felt as if he had slapped her face. Why was he behaving this way? Did he not himself invite her to visit him again if she …

Her error dawned upon her then—had she not changed back into her school uniform after dinner for this very reason? Was her bum not chilled already in its uncovered state? How could she have been so stupid?

Praying that she was not too late to prevent her eviction, she yanked the hem of her skirt up to her waist, baring her naked cunt to him, just as he had instructed her to do, feeling her face flame with the degradation of it. She closed her eyes, hating herself for subjecting herself to this treatment—and her traitorous quim throbbed in need.

When next he spoke, he was standing right beside her, having moved across the room without making a sound to alert her to his presence. Her eyes flew open in some alarm.

‘Oh my,’ he said silkily, ‘did the Head Girl walk down from Gryffindor Tower to the dungeons without her knickers on, wearing only a skirt?’ He leant close to her, his lips beside her ear. ‘Or did you step out of your underpants in your teacher’s office, hoping he would touch your cunt, hmm?’

The sound of his voice beguiled her even as his words shamed and excited her. The ache of need pooled hot within her, and she was aware of a whimper passing her lips.

‘That was not a rhetorical question, Hermione,’ he said. ‘I require an answer.’

‘I didn’t wear them,’ she whispered. ‘I left my room without them.’

‘I see,’ he murmured, circling her like a predator, his glittering black eyes roving over her. ‘Tuck the skirt in the waistband to free your hands,’ he instructed, and Hermione shoved the hem down the
front waistband so that it bunched at her waist but did not fall to hide her nakedness from his sight. ‘Now,’ he purred, standing directly behind her, looking down from his greater height, ‘use your fingers to part your labia—hold them spread open so I can see your clit.’

Her fingers trembled as she reached down to do his bidding, her clitoris wanting more contact as she brushed against it, parting her labia. He stayed behind her, his breathing just a touch unsteady, as if something about her humiliation excited him, and her own arousal increased at the very notion, a minute tremor affecting her legs, making it difficult to stand still.

He moved around now to face her, and he squatted gracefully before her, his nostrils flaring as he caught her scent. He studied her spread quim as if he had never seen one before—or if he found hers quite fascinating, an idea which fed the fire of need quaking through her.

‘And how many of your little classmates have you permitted to touch you since last you were here?’ he inquired evenly, his gaze still upon her nether parts.

‘N-none!’ she blurted, surprised.

‘No one has touched you here since I did?’ he said, placing the index finger of his right hand upon her clitoris.

‘Only me,’ she admitted, her mortification now complete, but she scarcely noticed—all she wanted was his touch; only that mattered.

‘Ah,’ he said, rising effortlessly. ‘I knew a little slut such as you, Hermione, could not go without climaxing at least once a day.’ He touched her chin with the finger which had been in her quim, and she smelt the pungent odour of her own arousal. He forced her chin up until her eyes met his, and before she could fathom his intention, he had slipped into her mind, rifling through her memories with apparent interest.

Hermione saw herself on her bed with Number Fourteen, writhing; in the bath, twisting her nipples before slipping her hands beneath the water to masturbate; sitting in a chair before her mirror, watching herself as she rubbed her clitoris.

‘Sometimes more than once a day,’ he murmured, disengaging.
‘You shouldn’t use Legilimency without asking!’ she gasped.

One coal black eyebrow arched. ‘You wish to dictate to me?’ he inquired dangerously. ‘Think carefully before you answer, Hermione.’

She bit her lip to keep from speaking, terrified that he would send her away, never to return. She had come here of her own free will—she knew the rules—in this room, if he wished to peruse her memories, it was his prerogative. She had agreed, had she not?

‘No, sir,’ she said, feeling the chill air of the room cooling the heat in her quim, held open and exposed. She felt so foolish, standing here so exposed and knowing that she would do anything he asked if only he would touch her again and make her feel as he had done before.

‘Then you are ready to take your punishment?’ he asked.

‘Y-yes,’ she responded, relief making her feel a little weak. ‘Please,’ she added, thinking he would like that.

He did not appear to have heard her, for he turned and walked to the table before speaking again. ‘Bend over the table edge,’ he instructed her, and she began to move in his direction, not daring to release the lips of her labia even though it made walking awkward in the extreme.

‘But am I not going to be over your knee?’ she asked plaintively, remembering how it had felt.

He waited until she reached him and had bent obediently over the table to answer her. ‘No,’ he said sternly, ‘you entered this room with your cunt covered, and you questioned me. I’m afraid that you have not earned such a friendly spanking as that.’

And in the dim reflection of the glass window, she saw him begin to remove his belt.
He was removing his belt? Hermione began to stand.

‘Do not move,’ he hissed, and she froze in position, hearing his displeasure and afraid to continue.

‘I’m afraid,’ she said, straining to look over her shoulder to see what he was doing.

‘Your fear is part of your need, Hermione,’ he said. ‘I will, however, help you with that.’

Hermione calmed slightly, waiting for him to move over to the couch and invite her to join him there, but instead, she felt her wrists encircled and realised he had magically secured her arms so that she was held in position. She could neither back away from the table, nor could she stand. This was his idea of helping?

‘Tell me what you want, Hermione,’ he said silkily, and the long fingers of one of his hands trailed down her bare bottom.

‘I—’ she began, tugging fruitlessly at the invisible bonds holding her in place ‘I w-want to c-come!’ Sweet Merlin, had she said that out loud? Told her professor she wanted to climax at his hand? Had she no shame?

‘That is of no interest to me now,’ he informed her ruthlessly. ‘Your punishment for your behaviour is what we are discussing.’ The tormenting hand now trailed from one buttock cheek to the other. ‘Tell me what you need.’

Hermione swallowed, inwardly squirming, her panic escalating. Spanking by his hand had hurt, yes—had made her cry until she was an empty vessel, more at peace than she had ever been—but the belt frightened her. It was going to hurt more, she was sure of it, and did not possess the intimacy of his hand slapping her bottom. But perhaps if she endured the belt, he would reward her with his fingers …

‘I need your attentions, sir,’ she whispered, her voice breaking with the storm of emotion surging through her.

‘Good girl,’ he murmured, and the words of praise thrilled through her like a sexual caress, setting her quim to aching for release. ‘Your answer pleases me.’ The fingers stroked to the apex of her thighs, and he cupped her vulva from behind, drawing a half-sob of need from her. ‘Spread your legs farther apart for me, Hermione,’ he purred.

Hermione complied with his request, feeling her quim throb with each beat of her heart as he held it in the palm of his hand, the dewy dampness of her arousal slick upon his skin.

‘Excellent,’ he praised and removed his hand from her body, pulling a sob of protest from her throat. 

Don’t go! she thought, instinctively thrusting her hips back in search of his touch.

That was when the first blow of his belt struck her bum, startling a cry from her. Shockingly, it wasn’t unbearably painful. It impacted both cheeks with about the same force as his hardest hand-spanking blows had been—and oddly enough, just as when he had spanked her with his hand, the sensation was felt most strongly in her quim, increasing the ache, a hot, heavy feeling between her legs.
With sure, measured strokes, he whipped her bottom, never striking the exact same place twice in a row. Hermione was unable to remain still or quiet; by the fourth blow, she was crying, and by the seventh, she was sobbing onto the tabletop. At the same time, she was acutely aware of his intense focus upon her, and even through her tears, she could not keep her eyes from the indistinct reflection of his activity in the glass wall, his hawkish features frowning with concentration as his arm rose and fell and rose again. By the tenth stroke, her bottom felt as if it were on fire, and her centre was on fire was well, the moisture of her arousal dampening her upper thighs as she danced under the falling lash.

Seconds passed without a further blow, and she strained to look over her shoulder. He stood in a relaxed posture, both hands hanging by his sides, with the folded-over belt held in his left hand. His chest rose and fell as he recovered his breathing from his exertions, and the glittering black eyes studied her backside as if appreciating his work. Then he dropped the belt and a silent Summoning Charm caused a ruby red glass jar to fly to him. He unscrewed the top and approached more closely, dipping his fingers into the jar and covering them with a sweet-smelling ointment.

‘You did very well,’ he said quietly, touching her sore bottom with the cool slickness on his fingertips and beginning to massage it into her skin. ‘Relax and allow me to attend to you, Hermione.’

She lowered her head onto the table, seeing several inches from her face the book in which he had been writing. The sensation of the cool ointment and his hands upon her flesh brought a languorous, drifting feeling to her mind as her tears dried upon her face, and she gazed at the book, wondering what it was, and what he had written in it. Was it a marking book where he recorded his students’ grades? Or a journal in which he recorded his thoughts? The strong, supple fingers spread the healing lotion over her bottom, and the memory of the pain receded, leaving her with the warmth of his words of praise, and the dripping aching need between her legs.

‘Are you more comfortable now?’ he asked, and she realised he had bent over her, his face near to hers.

Unable to speak, she nodded her head in assent.

The clock on the mantelpiece began to chime the hour, and Hermione realised a scant thirty minutes had passed since she had entered his study. How could that be? It had felt like an eternity.

The last of the chimes faded away, and still he was bent over her. ‘Are you ready for your reward?’ he asked, his very voice exacerbating the painful need she felt.

‘Please,’ she choked out, staining against her bonds for the first time in several minutes. Why would he not permit her to touch him?

The warmth of his large hand insinuated itself once again between her thighs, cupping her mound, and she pushed back against him, moving her legs apart, desperate for friction to still the raging in her blood.

‘Shall I make you come?’ he asked her, as if he were unaware of her wishes.

‘Yes!’ she cried, strength returning to her voice as her body clamoured for him. ‘Yes, do it!’

‘Tell me what you need, Hermione,’ he purred, increasing the pressure of the hand cupping her, until one finger slipped between her folds.

‘Touch me!’ she cried, jerking her hips convulsively upon his hand. ‘I need to come! Please!’
'Of course,’ he said courteously, and then he was no longer bending over her.

She twisted her head and looked over her shoulder, but he wasn’t there. Then the actions of his hands tore a shuddering moan from her lips, and her head sagged again to the tabletop, where she stared in fascination at the shadowy reflection in the glass wall. He was kneeling down at her feet, his hands opening her body to his inspection, from the tight bud of her bottom to the drenched folds of her quim.

Then his face was buried in her cunt, and coherent brain function ceased in the onslaught of sensation.

She felt the broad, flat of his tongue lick her from her clitoris to her perineum and then back again. A feral, keening sound filled her ears, and it was not until she was aware of thrusting and grinding madly against the professor’s face that she knew the inarticulate cries were issuing from her throat. Dear God, nothing that had ever happened to her had felt like this; he had completely emptied her and now was filling her up again, taking all of the confusion and uncertainty and dissatisfaction and replacing it with light and pleasure and … and … and …

She felt his lips close about the bud of her clitoris, his fingers spreading her even wider, and she shattered, her keening cries solidifying into cries of pure bliss as she dissolved like sugar in his mouth.

The shivering which overtook her in the aftermath was not unlike her post-orgasm response before. He acted swiftly, releasing her magical bonds and lifting her into his arms, sitting on the cobalt blue sofa and Summoning the green blanket to drape over her. She shivered and shuddered in reaction, and he held her, murmuring.

‘You did very well, Hermione,’ he whispered into her hair, his strong arms anchoring her against his body. ‘I could not be more pleased with you.’

She clung to him and breathed in his dark, musky scent, overlaid by the odours of his shampoo and his shaving lotion, all the while stroking the lush cashmere of his jumper. It was luxurious and soft, the dark green sweater, but it wasn’t enough. She wanted to touch him as he had touched her, to kiss his face and to taste herself upon his lips, yet she had not the energy to raise her head from his shoulder.

At last, the clock chimed again, this time the half-hour, and he spoke to her firmly, already beginning to distance himself from her. ‘Can you stand?’ he asked her.

She didn’t want to leave him, but she knew enough to recognise when she was being dismissed. ‘Yes, I think so,’ she said.

He helped her to stand, efficiently disentangling the blanked from her limbs, and stepped back from her to see if she could remain on her feet unassisted. Hermione looked up at him, then averted her eyes. How could he draw her to him and then put her from him without missing a beat? She found it quite disconcerting. ‘Thank you,’ she said shyly. ‘How do you know what I need?’

‘How I know is not important,’ he said gravely. ‘The only important thing that I do know what you need—do I not, Hermione?’

‘Yes, sir,’ she whispered, savouring the utter peace inside of her. ‘Can’t I stay for a while?’

He frowned. ‘There is no need for you stay once your physical recovery is complete. Do not try to make of this arrangement something other than what it is.’ He stepped away from her. ‘I have an
engagement for which I am late. I must ask you to leave, now.’

An engagement? Did he have a date? Was that why he was clean and sweet-smelling and wearing the forest green jumper, which emphasised the breadth of his chest and his fit, flat tummy? A sick, unhappy feeling tore through her, twisting and unsettling, disturbing her peace. She wanted to ask a thousand prying questions, but she could tell from his expression that her time was at an end.

‘May I return?’ she asked, hating herself for displaying such a lack of reserve.

He inclined his head. ‘As you have need,’ he agreed. ‘Good night, Hermione.’

Hermione turned away from him and went to the door, glancing over her shoulder as she opened it, hoping to find his burning, intense eyes upon her retreating back, but he had already busied himself at the far end of the table, removing his book, quill and ink to a shelf on the bookcase. She paused for a moment in the doorway, waiting for inspiration to strike, wanting to leave him with a memorable parting phrase, but nothing occurred to her. Finally she left his presence, sadly closing the door behind her.
Chapter 6 - An Invitation

Hermione sat in the embrasure of her dormitory window, staring out onto the moonlit grounds. She still wore her school uniform, and the residue of her slick arousal had dried upon on thighs, the odour mixing with that of the sweet-smelling ointment he had tenderly rubbed into the skin on her bottom. The very memory caused a new ache to awaken in her, filling her with despair.

*What am I going to do?* she thought, wrapping her arms about herself and hugging tightly. *He makes me want things I know are sick and wrong.* If anyone had ever told me about a teacher behaving such a way with a student—or even a man behaving that way with a woman—it would have filled me with disgust. *How can he … how can I…* 

She began to rock herself in an unconscious comforting motion, staring almost unseeingly out into the night. She remained that way until a tiny, shadowy figure passed through the school gates onto the road to Hogsmeade. It was him! He was off to keep his engagement.

All thoughts of wrongness left her, and she jumped down from the window seat, casting a Cleansing Charm and already formulating a plan.

Shivering beneath Harry’s Invisibility Cloak, Hermione hurried down the road to Hogsmeade in the wake of her professor. If his destination had not been the village, she had no hope of finding him, but perhaps he was sitting in one of the pubs, having a pint with friends. Did Professor Snape have friends? It was a funny thought, really. Schoolmates from his own year were obviously not to his taste—she had seen how he behaved with Sirius and Professor Lupin in the Shrieking Shack—but perhaps he had friends from the village … perhaps he dated women from the village.

*Why would I care?* she thought, even as she hurried her steps towards the Three Broomsticks. *He has no interest in me that way … he’s made it very clear.* Still, she had to know, if she could, just whom he was meeting at ten o’clock on a Friday night.

Out of breath, she arrived at the village and hurried down the High Street to the pub, whose windows spilled warm light onto the darkened street. Hermione was pleased to see a group of laughing, middle-aged wizards exit the pub. Holding the Invisibility Cloak closely about her, she slipped past them into the interior, hugging the wall.

She saw him immediately at a table near the back of the room, sitting at his ease across from a witch with soft, golden brown hair. As Hermione watched, her professor laughed and reached forward to refill the witch’s goblet from the bottle of honey mead on the table between them. Hermione felt her heart drop to her feet as the uncomfortable, twisting feeling in her tummy returned. She knew the woman—a shop girl, really, who worked for the village apothecary, measuring out armadillo bile and dragon scales for the customers. Her name was Taffy, or Hetty, or something equally ridiculous.

Tears burned Hermione’s eyes as she stood, watching them interact. The shop girl was younger than he was and watched him with wide blue eyes, seemingly a bit in awe. Hermione wanted to cross the room and slap that shy smile from the other witch’s face—to grab her by her soft, non-bushy, non-frizzy hair and drag her out of the pub and back to the apothecary shop, where she rightfully belonged.

The pub door opened, admitting a smiling, hand-holding couple, and Hermione took that opportunity to bolt into the street. She began to hurry back to Hogwarts, unmindful of the angry tears streaming down her face.
She can’t give him what he wants, the traitorous voice in her mind whispered.

Hermione shook her head, as if to disagree with the voice. She didn’t care—she was finished. If she had to chain herself to her bedposts at night to keep herself from going to him, she would do it.

Finished.

Existence had taken on a dim, dingy, ashen quality. The absence of the possibility of time with him removed all the colour from her world, darkened her life to the point that some days, she had difficulty putting one foot before the other. Food tasted like ashes, and she began to lose weight. The boys noticed there was something wrong, but she scarcely knew what to tell them.

‘I’m feeling a bit under the weather,’ she explained.

‘You’d better see Madam Pomfrey,’ Harry said, his green eyes warm with concern.

‘I will,’ she promised, knowing she wouldn’t go, but needing to speak the words to send Harry on his way.

The only thing for which she could muster energy was schoolwork. Doggedly, she went to classes, completed her assignments well ahead of time, and turned them in … except for Potions. In Potions, she sat at the back of the room, kept her head down, and did not look at or speak to her professor while she was in his classroom. It was bad enough to hear his hissed instructions to the NEWT Potions students, conjuring up memories of silkier tones whispering filthy things to her as he fingered her, but it was infinitely worse to look up and find his glittering black eyes on her, a frown between his brows.

Infinitely worse.

She lay in her bed at night, staring listlessly out the window. No longer did she ache and pine for him: She felt nothing. She did not permit herself to feel. Feeling made her want him, made her debase and humiliate herself. It was better not to feel than to be used and discarded like waste tissue.

Wasn’t it?

By mid-October, she had lost enough weight that she had to fasten her skirt with a Muggle safety pin; by the week of Hallowe’en, she had begun to physically weaken, so that her magic became less precise. Still, she clenched her teeth and persevered, determined not to give in. A tall, dark figure haunted her dreams, and lack of nourishment and insufficient sleep began to blur the line between sleeping and waking, until it seemed that the dark figure of her dreams followed her even in her daylight hours, but she did not let it tempt her or deter her.

On Hallowe’en, she sat in solitary state at her table in the very back of the dungeon Potions classroom, struggling to comprehend the instructions scrawled spikily across the chalkboard.

‘Minced daisy roots,’ she murmured to herself, setting out her ingredients. ‘Skinned shrivelfig,’ she said, taking up her silver dagger.

Blearily she worked, struggling to concentrate, concerned because she could not see Professor Snape anywhere in the classroom. Had he gone into his office? He usually sat at this desk marking essays as they worked. She took up her measuring cup and poured out pomegranate juice, and a bruising hand closed about her wrist before she could pour the liquid into her cauldron.
‘Is it your desire to cause an explosion?’ the dreaded—No, desired! her inner voice babbled—voice hissed.

Hermione stopped dead. She did not move or breathe, think or blink.

‘Answer me!’ he demanded.

Hermione bit her lip and did not speak. Instead, she squinted at the directions on the chalkboard and saw the formula called for peppermint oil, rather than pomegranate juice. She closed her eyes, feeling a bit sick to her stomach. She had never made an error of that type—Except on purpose! the know-it-all within reminded her—in all her years of Potions classes. It was one thing to wish to avoid Professor Snape and to take every precaution against the temptation to return to his study and subject herself to his commands, but it was another thing entirely to so compromise her health that she almost blew up herself and her nearest classmates, simply because she was unable to concentrate properly.

‘Hermione.’ He had never spoken her name except when they were alone, and the tone of his voice woke a glimmer of heat within her.

No! She wouldn’t falter!

With less a less than gentle touch, Professor Snape wrenched the cup from her hand and set it on the table, Vanishing its contents first, then the contents of her cauldron with a vicious jab of his wand. She was about to protest his actions when the bell rang, and she realised the class period was over—she could never have completed the assignment, even if she had poured the proper liquid into her cup. That had never happened to her before—she had always completed her assignments …

He man-handled her onto her stool, pressing her down with his hands upon her shoulders, then gave his next instructions.

‘Place your properly labelled samples upon my desk and clear your workspaces,’ the professor said, his low, clear voice ringing across the classroom. The NEWT students complied with his instructions, scurrying out the door as quickly as they could, and still he remained directly behind Hermione. She began to clear away her ingredients, repacking her Potions kit, waving Harry and Ron off with a grimace, as if she had to remain behind to be told off by Professor Snape. When the classroom was empty, the door slammed closed and locked itself, and Hermione gripped the edge of the table before her, steeling herself against what was to come next.

‘Into my office,’ he said, but she did not move from her spot. His office was but a doorway away from his study … and how could she possibly prevent herself from passing through the hidden doorway if it glowed green before her? No, she didn’t dare to move.

He leant closer, crowding into her personal space, his breath, smelling of the dark cherry tart they had been served at lunch, fanning over her cheek. ‘Do not push me, Hermione,’ he warned.

In answer, she shook her head violently, but it was a poor choice of action. Once in motion, she could not seem to stop the spinning of the room, and before her professor could utter another threat, she slid neatly off her stool and crumpled at his feet.

‘Wake up now, Hermione,’ he commanded.

Her eyes fluttered open—how could she fail to do as he asked? —and he crouched at her side, his austere face hovering mere inches from her own.
‘Thank Merlin,’ he breathed and drew farther away from her.

Hermione struggled to sit, but he restrained her with one hand upon her shoulder.

‘When did you last eat?’ he demanded.

‘At lunch,’ she said, her voice scratchy.

He frowned. ‘Pushing food from one side of the plate to the other does not constitute ingestion, Hermione,’ he snapped.

She blinked. ‘Were you watching me eat?’ she asked him.

He did not respond but stood, bending and scooping her into his arms.

‘Where are we going?’ she asked fearfully, but he did not answer her. He carried her into his office and placed her in the chair before his desk, standing beside her for a moment as if to make sure that she did not slide out of it.

‘You’re not sleeping either, are you?’ he said harshly, his glittering black eyes boring into hers, and before she could even think to look away, he was in her mind, making free of her memories.

What tiny bit of strength she retained she mustered to push him away, but she was no match for him, either physically or magically—certainly not in her weakened condition. In quick succession she saw herself in the Invisibility Cloak in the Three Broomsticks; she heard her vows to herself not to go to him again for any reason; she saw a string of sleepless nights, interspersed with barely touched meals; and always, she heard the litany which had become her mantra over the last few weeks. *Stay away from him! Don’t look at him! Don’t speak to him! Don’t go to him! Don’t think of him! Don’t think at all! Don’t feel!*

Then he withdrew from her mind, and she struck at him with her hands, infuriated but weak. She landed a glancing blow to the side of his head, but he seemed not to feel it; he simply captured her hands in his own and remained quiet as she struggled to free herself from his grasp.

When at last she subsided, he released her hands. She looked up at him, tears of indignation standing in her eyes, and he studied her face.

‘I would like to have the opportunity to speak with you,’ he said with careful neutrality. ‘I would like to invite you to enter my study, where I would like for you to ingest some nourishment and have a conversation with me. Will you consent to do that, Hermione?’ he asked.

*Do it!* the chorus in her mind screamed. She looked down at her hands, gripped desperately in her lap. ‘But I’ve worked so hard not to,’ she whispered brokenly.

He knelt before her, until he was looking up into her downcast face. ‘I am aware,’ he said, and his tone was almost gentle, as one might speak to a frightened unicorn. ‘On other visits to my study, you have been under a certain set of rules. Today, I would like to suspend those rules, and institute some special ones. Today, if you consent to enter my study, you are not required to do anything you do not wish to do. You may stand up and walk out at any time with no negative consequences. You may say whatever you wish to say to me.’

She looked dubious, and a glimmer of a smile touched his thin lips, nearly humanising his face.

‘Will you come? I would be very pleased.’
Ignoring the excited murmurs of the chorus in her mind, she looked down into his hook-nosed face and desperately tried to consider. All he wanted was for her to eat and talk to him—she didn’t have to wait until spoken to before speaking or do as she was told without question—she could walk out at any time.

‘All right,’ she said.

‘Good girl,’ he murmured, and the glowing green doorway appeared behind his desk. He put a hand beneath her elbow and helped her stand, maintaining his hold as they moved around his desk. ‘I’m not taking any chances on you fainting again,’ he explained, then the study door opened, and the rippling green light poured over them.

And in spite of her best intentions, Hermione entered the professor’s study with a genuine lightening of the darkness in her soul.
Chapter 7 - The Conversation

He led her straight over to the table, upon which two bowls of thick stew were joined by a basket of freshly baked bread; a dish of butter and two glasses of milk completed the meal, with a chocolate gateau for pudding. He helped her into a chair, then took the seat at the head of the table. ‘We’ll eat first, then talk,’ he said simply. ‘If necessary, I can provide you with a potion to sharpen your desire to partake of nourishment.’

Hermione looked at the food, and for the first time in days her appetite stirred. ‘I think I’ll be fine,’ she said. She picked up her spoon and dipped it into the gravy; when it touched her tongue, she hummed with enjoyment. With her next spoonful, she brought a morsel of meat and carrot to her mouth, and the food exploded with flavour in her mouth. She took a piece of bread, spread it with butter, and took a bite, washing it all down with a gulp of cold milk.

Seemingly satisfied that she would eat, Professor Snape took up his spoon and ate a bite of stew, but his eyes remained focussed on Hermione. She dabbed at her mouth with the heavy green damask napkin and said, ‘Didn’t you eat lunch?’

He swallowed and had recourse to his napkin, too. ‘Yes,’ he agreed, ‘but I didn’t want you to eat alone.’

Hermione smiled—just a quirk of her lips—for the first time in what seemed days, and she continued to slowly eat the meal her professor had so thoughtfully provided for her. Her attention was divided between her bowl and her companion, who seemed to be watching her intently each time she looked at him.

When half her bowl of stew was gone, she felt rather full—after all, it had been a while since she’d eaten a complete meal—and she took the gateau, digging in with real delight. She half expected Professor Snape to object, but he continued to watch her without interference, a mere quirk of his eyebrow indicating amusement at her enjoyment of the chocolate confection. When she had licked her spoon clean and swallowed the last of her milk, she turned her eyes to his face.

‘What next?’ she asked.

‘Next, you may be a bit sleepy,’ he said.

Hermione felt a sudden onset of drowsiness, as if triggered by his words. She frowned and stifled a yawn. ‘But we were going to talk,’ she said forlornly.

‘We will,’ he assured her. He stood, took her by the hand, and pulled her to her feet, leading her to the cobalt blue couch. ‘Rest your eyes for a while, and when you wake up, we will have our talk,’ he promised soothingly.

Too sleepy to argue further, Hermione lay down upon the sofa, resting her head upon a red velvet cushion, which seemed to appear out of nowhere. She was nearly asleep as he Summoned the emerald green rug to tuck her in …

When she woke, the shimmering green light was gone. The room was dimly lit, illumination coming from the roaring fire. The impenetrable blackness beyond the glass wall told her that the sun had long since set. Silhouetted by the firelight was her professor, his sharp face in stark relief. He sat in a wingback chair near her head, a book in his hands, and he looked up when she stirred, his black
eyes intent upon her.

‘What time is it?’ she asked, her voice still thick with sleep.

‘Nearly nine o’clock,’ he replied. ‘How do you feel?’

She struggled a bit, then managed to rise to a sitting position. He did not offer assistance, but watched her carefully. ‘I missed the Hallowe’en feast,’ she said, feeling a bit sad; she had not done so in years—not since attending Nearly Headless Nick’s five-hundredth death day party, five years before—the feast food at Hogwarts was always outstanding. Just thinking about it made her tummy rumble, drawing a near smile from Professor Snape.

‘I see; you feel well enough to be hungry,’ he murmured. Inclining his head towards the table behind him, he said, ‘I have an assortment of the feast foods under a Warming Charm for you, if you would care to eat again.’

Hermione rubbed a hand over her face. ‘I need the loo first, please,’ she said.

‘Of course,’ he responded, and a doorway which had not been there before shimmered into existence on the wall beyond the table. ‘You’ll find the lavatory through that door,’ he advised her.

Hermione rose and moved to the door on legs which became steadier with each step. Entering the professor’s bathroom, she was surprised to see that it was not simply a toilet and a sink, but a complete bathroom, including both an old-fashioned bathtub on clawed feet and a more modern shower; fluffy white towels bearing the Hogwarts shield of arms hung from the bar on the wall, and a man’s toiletries were lined up neatly on an open shelf above the sink, just below the mirror.

Washing her hands after relieving her bladder, she could not help examining his things with keen interest. A toothbrush and tube of the toothpaste provided for the students’ use rested beside a Muggle safety razor; next to the razor was a simple glass flagon with a cork stopper. She bent over to sniff at it and realised the liquid, roughly the shade of her father’s favourite cognac, was the professor’s aftershave—it appeared that he brewed his own.

She dried her hands and went back out into the study, finding the professor seated at the table as he had been earlier in the day; he had removed the covers from the silver salvers, and a delectable array of food was revealed. Her mouth watered, and she seated herself eagerly. There was no mistaking the slight smile upon his thin lips as he passed a platter of roast beef to her.

‘I am happy to see your appetite has returned,’ he commented mildly, now passing her the basket of Yorkshire pudding.

Hermione spooned roast potatoes onto her plate. ‘Did you drug me, before?’ she asked.

‘A very mild sleeping draught in your milk,’ he admitted calmly.

‘Is any of this food drugged?’ She paused with a forkful of beef halfway to her mouth.

‘No,’ her professor said, and she began to eat with gusto. He ate as well, and they both consumed a hearty meal. Hermione relished the food, but she was sorry to have missed what would be her last Hallowe’en feast at Hogwarts.

‘It’s better to be here, alone with him,’ a tiny voice whispered. She glanced over at Professor Snape and found him watching her. Pulse quickening, she reflected that perhaps the voice was right. There was nothing in the world quite like enjoying her professor’s undivided attention.
'Have you eaten your fill?’ he asked her when she had licked the last of the chocolate éclair crumbs from her plate.

Hermione wiped her mouth with her napkin. ‘Yes, thank you.’

He stood without speaking and gestured to the armchairs situated most closely to the fire; Hermione noted for the first time that Professor Snape had showered whilst she slept. He was once again without his robes and tightly buttoned coat, but was wearing instead black boots and trousers, topped by another cashmere jumper, this one in midnight blue. A sick feeling stirred in her as she moved to the indicated chair—did he have yet another engagement with Taffy-the-shop-girl? Surely not—he had taken so much time making her eat and sleep—if he had a date with some witch from the village, he would have hurried her in and out, wouldn’t he?

She sat down, and he sat across from her. Hermione shifted uncomfortably in her seat, wishing suddenly that her meeting with Professor Snape were over—had never begun—that she had never begun her more intimate association with him. It seemed she had never experienced one moment of peace since it had begun, except for those moments when he had held her, after making her come in a screaming loss of all dignity. She averted her face from his and fidgeted with the hem of her jumper.

‘I would like to speak with you regarding the nature of our most recent private interactions,’ Professor Snape said, and Hermione jerked her head up to look at him, her heartbeat accelerating.

‘All right,’ she said.

‘I would like to make one thing clear from the very beginning: Your desires are natural ones, Hermione, and are perfectly normal for you,’ he began. ‘You are not the only person in the world to harbour such desires, and there is nothing either sick or wrong about them. They may be different from the intimate desires of other people you know, but that does not make them immoral or unnatural.’

Hermione felt her face flush as his frank acknowledgement of her desires; certainly, no one knew more about those desires than he did, but it was both thrilling and embarrassing to have him speak of those dark desires so matter-of-factly.

‘Allow me to draw a parallel between your desires and your intelligence,’ he continued. ‘Is your intelligence in the normal range, Hermione?’

‘No,’ she answered promptly.

‘Of course it isn’t,’ he agreed. ‘Your intelligence is remarkable, well above that of your peers. Would you consider restricting yourself intellectually or academically to hold yourself down to the level of expectations or standards of other people?’

‘No!’ she blurted indignantly, and a slight smile touched his face. She gave him an answering smile, feeling a bit sheepish. He certainly knew how to push her buttons.

‘Then do not let the notions with which you were raised restrict your expectations of what you ought to seek out in the way of sexual or emotional satisfaction. It is just possible that what you want and need in that arena is completely beyond the ken of the people you have known thus far in your life.’

Hermione studied him as she pondered his words. Could it be as simple as that? Could it be that in judging her emerging desires by the standards of her parents—or even by the standards of the other
witches her age—she was doing herself a disservice? What if it was neither sick nor wrong to want to be spanked—to crave having filthy words whispered to her—to become inexplicably aroused by being told what to do and obeying those instructions?

A flutter awoke within her, like a bird whose wings flapped hopefully against the bars of its cage.

Professor Snape leant towards her, resting his elbows upon his knees and lacing his fingers together. ‘It is possible that I mistook the level of your emotional need—the impact that meeting that need would have upon you. It is not so powerful for everyone. You are a uniquely apt submissive, Hermione, more suited to submission to a Dominant than any woman, witch or Muggle, I have ever seen—you were born for this.’

Hermione listened to him excitedly, the odd words bouncing about in her mind, pinging from one association to another as she scrambled to assimilate the information—and at the same time, she swelled with pride at his praise. He said she was born for this—the best he had ever seen—this, from a teacher who was loath to so much as acknowledge her competence in his classroom. It was heady stuff, and she was thrilled to hear it.

He continued to speak to her, his remarkable focus making her feel as if she sat in a powerful spotlight. ‘I introduced this world to you, and if it is your wish, while you and I remain at Hogwarts, I will be willing to continue to guide you. Then, when you leave school, I will provide you with the means to contact other wizards and witches who live this lifestyle.’

‘It … it’s a <i>lifestyle</i>?’ she whispered, unsure if she was appalled or amazed.

‘It is, indeed,’ he answered.

‘But what about you?’ she asked, picking only one of the myriad questions flitting about in her mind.

‘You need not concern yourself about me,’ he said firmly.

‘But sir,’ she objected, ‘what’s in this arrangement for you? Why did you even begin this with me? You’ve never even allowed me to touch you!’

Professor Snape looked very grave and appeared to be choosing his words carefully as he answered her. ‘I take too much for granted—I forget that you know nothing of the dynamics of Dominance and submission.’

He straightened again, leaning back in his chair, suddenly on very sure ground. The power emanating from him enthralled her, and she found herself leaning forward as she listened to him.

‘Hermione, the Dominant <i>needs</i> the submissive—needs to dominate her, to correct her, to discipline her, to control her, all with her consent—as much as she needs to be commanded, punished, and fulfilled by him. The emotional and sexual needs of the Dominant are as electrified and satisfied by the interaction as are the submissive’s.’

Hermione felt heat between her legs at his words, and she forced herself to ask the next question, stumbling gracelessly over her words. ‘Were you … were you <i>aroused</i> by what we did together?’

He gazed at her steadily. After a moment of silence, his eyes moved from her face and travelled in a leisurely way down her torso, continuing to her toes, then back up to her face. Hermione did not know how much time had passed; it seemed to have stopped—but she did not realise she had been holding her breath until he answered her, and air burst forcefully from her lungs.
'Very much so,' he replied evenly, only the glittering of his black eyes conveying the force behind his words.

For a moment, Hermione found herself bereft of speech as they gazed unabashedly into each other’s eyes. Then another of her urgent questions popped into her mind and she forced herself to speak.

‘What about Taffy the shop girl?’

His brows drew together in displeasure. ‘What about her?’ he replied.

‘Do you do this with her? Spank her and …’

He cut across her, his voice suddenly cold. ‘Watch your tone of voice, Hermione—I will not permit cheek. My personal life is none of your concern.’

‘Then mine is none of your concern!’ she cried, stung.

‘It could scarcely hold less interest for me,’ he sneered. ‘See as much as you like of your puling classmates, and do what you wish with them. It is of no importance to me.’

Her chin came up a fraction. ‘I want to know if you spank the apothecary girl,’ she said stubbornly.

His eyes narrowed. ‘I do not, at present, have another submissive with whom I meet.’

‘Then what do you do with her? Besides drinking and laughing in the pub,’ she added.

His lips tightened, a further sign of displeasure. ‘I was not pleased to see you had been using Potter’s Invisibility Cloak to spy on me,’ he said. ‘I will let it go this time, because we had not set any ground rules outside of this room. However, in the future, you are not to follow me when I leave the castle. It could be extremely dangerous. Disobedience of this rule would be grounds for immediately ending our association. Is that clear to you?’

Hermione squirmed with frustration, now flavoured by dread at the thought of having him refuse to see her any more. ‘I promise not to follow you when you leave the castle,’ she said, ‘but I want to know about—’

He sat forward and cut across her again, in a voice so forbidding that she found herself cringing back into her chair. ‘I have in the past, and will undoubtedly continue in the future, to have associations with women. What I have done, am doing, or will do with them is none of your business. I will satisfy your curiosity in one way: the witch with whom you saw me in the village is not a submissive.’

He glared at her until she averted her eyes, feeling a tiny flush of pleasure that he was not spanking Taffy.

<i>But is he fucking her?</i> the voice in her mind asked.

Hermione knew not to ask him now; perhaps she would have another opportunity to do so. For now, she felt better physically than she had done in weeks, and she had loads to think about and sort out in her mind. Thankfully, it was the weekend, and she would have an opportunity to do so. Perhaps there were books in the library she could read on Dominance and submission …

‘Do you have any other pertinent questions or comments for me, Hermione?’ Professor Snape inquired, his tone milder now that she had ceased to demand answers from him.
Hermione looked up into his face, noting the curtains of his black hair, which hung differently about his long, thin face when it was clean, and she allowed herself to freely gaze at the austere planes of his cheeks, dominated by his great, hooked nose. He was not handsome, and he was not nice, but she had never even imagined being so completely consumed with one wizard.

‘No more questions,’ she said, adding, ‘thank you.’

He inclined his head, accepting her thanks as his due. ‘Do you wish to continue our arrangement? Or do you need more time to consider?’

Hermione hurried into speech. ‘I <i>do</i> wish to continue, sir,’ she said. ‘Please.’

He nodded. ‘Good girl,’ he said. ‘Nevertheless, for tonight only, the special rules I outlined before you came into my study remain.’

Hermione smiled her understanding, thankful that he was not rushing her out the door. Perhaps he <i>wasn’t</i> seeing that Taffy woman tonight, after all.

‘Now,’ he said, and Hermione directed her attention to him, for his tone of voice had changed, becoming almost playful. ‘Would you like to see the gift I have for you?’ he asked.

Hermione almost bounced in her seat, excitement and pleasure and a giddy feeling of being singled out and <i>special</i> thrilling through her. ‘Yes!’ she cried.

He stood from his chair and offered her his hand. Hermione placed her hand in his, thrilling to the touch of his fingers upon hers, and he led to sit upon the cobalt blue sofa; he sat down at her side.

‘<i>Accio</i> Hermione’s gift,’ he said, and a book-sized, gift-wrapped box flew into his hand.

Hermione studied the silver paper and green velvet ribbon on the box, thinking that it was far too flat to actually be a book. What had he bought for her?

With a self-satisfied smirk upon his face, Professor Snape laid the box upon her lap.

‘What is it?’ she asked, the giddy feeling singing inside of her like pealing bells.

‘Open it and find out,’ he suggested.
Chapter 8 - The Gift

Hermione slipped the ribbon from about the package and ran her fingers beneath the overlapped paper, easily lifting the Spellotape. Beneath the heavy silver paper was a sleek red box with a discreet black T&T monogrammed in the lower right corner—the box had come from Twilfitt and Tatting, then—but that was a rather posh shop in Diagon Alley, the wizards’ Harrods. What on earth could he have bought there for her?

His warm breath caressed her cheek. ‘It’s easier to see when you lift the top off the box,’ he advised, his warm baritone sending a thrill of pleasure skittering down her spine.

With slightly trembling fingers, Hermione lifted the top of the box, finding a swathe of red tissue paper. She swept the tissue paper aside and found beneath it a silver hairbrush. The broad paddle-shaped back was engraved with an ornate “H”, and the handle appeared to be fluted along the edges and filigreed in a pattern of trailing rose vines, which entwined with the monogram before spreading to the edges of the paddle-back.

‘Oh,’ she breathed, lifting the treasure from the red tissue paper, liking the feel of the brush in her hand, and she turned it over to view the bristles of stiff white nylon.

‘The black boar bristle was more aesthetically pleasing,’ he murmured, his head bent close to hers, ‘but for hair such as yours, the nylon bristles are recommended.’

Hermione turned her eyes to his, feeling as if she were lit up within from the pure joy of knowing he had shopped for her—specifically for her—going so far as to have her initial monogrammed on the item, seeking out the type of brush best for her wild, unruly mane. He had gone out of his way to please her—the knowledge left her breathless.

‘Thank you,’ she whispered, her fingers running lovingly over the monogrammed and engraved silver backing. Oddly enough, the surface was smooth to the touch, as if the heavy silver had been somehow encased in clear plastic—but Hermione well knew that the use of plastic was uncommon in wizarding manufacturing. ‘I can see the engraving, but I can’t feel it,’ she said aloud, expressing her puzzlement.

‘Ah,’ he said, ‘but this is a very special hairbrush.’ His fingers closed about handle of the brush, below where hers rested. ‘May I?’ he asked.

Wordlessly, Hermione nodded and allowed him to take it from her.

‘May I brush your hair?’ he asked deferentially, and the utter intimacy of the request brought a burning flush to Hermione’s cheeks.

Her hands flew to her hair, imperfectly secured in a ponytail at her nape. She hadn’t touched it since she had left her room early in the morning—since that time she had fainted and slept and hadn’t given a thought to it. ‘It’s a mess,’ she protested.

‘I’ll be very careful,’ he promised.

Unable to deny him such a benign request, she reached behind her head to free her bushy locks from the restrictive elastic, and her professor nodded his approval. ‘Should I just sit forward?’ she asked,
trembling to think of him grooming her.

‘Would you mind very much sitting upon a cushion at my feet?’ he asked quietly. ‘It will make it much easier for both of us, I believe.’

Hermione took up the red velvet cushion upon which she had napped and put it on the floor between his feet, settling herself between his legs, which had been parted to accommodate her presence. At first, she sat very stiffly, endeavouring not to lean against one of his legs. She bit the inside of her cheek and her hands twisted in her lap. Had Professor Snape had any experience brushing hair such as hers? His own hair was straight and fine, certainly nothing like her rather coarse, curling, bushy mare’s nest. What if the difficulty of drawing the hairbrush bristles through her hair made him impatient? Or sorry that he had bothered to purchase such an expensive gift for her? She gripped her hands together in misery and waited.

Yet for all her agonising, Professor Snape certainly seemed to know how to go about tidying her hair. He began at the very bottom and worked methodically through her hair, section by section, before beginning over again at a point midway between her earlobe and her shoulder and repeating the process. As he worked, he spoke to her, and before she knew what she was about, Hermione was as malleable wax in his hands, resting her left cheek upon his left knee until he was ready to brush the hair on that side, at which time he gently pressed her head to the other side, until her right cheek rested upon his right knee.

And all the time, he talked.

‘A submissive is her Master’s most treasured possession,’ he explained, patiently untangling her hair. ‘When he seats her at his feet, he is granting her the place of honour offered to no other. It is not at all uncommon for a Dominant to spend hours with his submissive at his feet as he showers her with pampering attention.’

He stroked the brush through her hair from her scalp to the tips of her brown locks, his large, warm hand following the path the brush had taken, smoothing her bushy hair in the wake of the nylon bristles.

‘For the submissive,’ he continued, ‘being permitted to sit at her Master’s feet is a prized honour. She is in his good graces, which makes both of them happy, and she is there to pet and be petted.’

Hermione lolled beneath his hands, safely bracketed by his long legs, yielding to the power of his voice, which fell upon her ears like chocolate caramel on ice cream. The submissive sat at her Dominant’s feet to pet him? Was he going to permit her to touch him? Her tummy flipped at the very notion, and the heat between her thighs began to ache.

‘One way for the Master to demonstrate his favour is to brush his submissive’s hair,’ he explained, matching word to action. ‘There is something very intimate, and at the same time, very relaxing, about the act of brushing hair—both from the standpoint of the one doing the brushing and the one being brushed—would you agree?’

She began to nod her head, then realised she might disrupt his rhythm, and she did not want to stop the delicious strokes of the bristles through her hair. ‘Yes,’ she said, her voice feeling creaky from disuse, though it had been less than half-an-hour since she had last spoken.

‘The hairbrush has an alternate use, as well,’ he continued, his voice soothing and inciting her simultaneously, a phenomenon she had come to associate only with her professor. ‘It can be used as
an implement to spank your naked bottom.’

A low moan issued from Hermione’s lips before she could arm herself against it; she was in a puddle of submission at his feet, utterly disarmed by his manner, his actions, and his words. Her desire for him was fully reawakened, throbbing in her centre with urgency. Turning fluidly and moving to her knees, she looked up into his enigmatic black eyes and said, ‘Please spank me with the hairbrush.’

He set the hairbrush on the sofa cushion beside him and studied her face. ‘But you are visiting tonight under special rules, Hermione. You do not have to do anything tonight.’

Without thinking, she wrapped her arms about his thighs and hugged them to her, trapping herself between his legs. ‘I know I don’t have to do it,’ she said. ‘But I want to do it, very badly.’ Hermione closed her eyes for a moment, feeling the pounding need in her body, then opened them and spoke again, her voice both hesitant and pleading. ‘I haven’t climaxed since the last time I was with you—please, sir—spank me with the hairbrush and make me come.’

He simply looked at her for a long time, and she waited, unconsciously beginning to count in her mind to prevent herself from pushing too hard. She had reached one hundred seventeen in her counting before he spoke again.

‘You don’t know it yet, Hermione, but you’re in a good position for begging—you’re on your knees.’ His eyes glittered now, and she was aware of a subtle shift in his manner, from instructive to active. ‘Very well,’ he said. ‘Remove your knickers and lie over my knee.’

Before she could feel hesitation or embarrassment, Hermione was on her feet, stepping out of her underpants and abandoning them upon the floor, intent only upon feeling his hand upon her flesh. She draped herself over his legs, and he expertly gathered her more firmly onto his lap, one arm holding her against him as the other tossed her skirt up and began to caress her buttocks.

The cold, slick back of the hairbrush touched the small of her back and was slipped over her bottom slowly, gliding until it rested coolly upon the backs of her thighs. ‘That’s what’s special about the hairbrush, you know,’ he said, stroking the smooth brush up from her thighs to her buttocks again, as if brushing her bottom with the non-bristle side of the hairbrush. ‘It’s charmed to be smooth to the touch, rather than ridged with the engraving, so that you can receive your pleasure spanking without ending up with your own initial pressed into your flesh.’

Hermione might have chuckled at this last comment had it not been immediately followed by the impact of the cool silver surface on the plumpest area of her bottom. Startled by the suddenness of her spanking, she cried out, but he paid her no mind, simply striking the other side of her bottom, giving her matching stinging spots, which were rapidly revisited, each in its turn, with additional blows from the gift he had given her.

Initially, Hermione tensed against the discomfort, having already forgotten the burning pain of being spanked, but he bent over her, his head alongside hers, and he said, ‘Do you like your gift, little slut?’

In some way she could not explain, his use of the word she had always thought to be derogatory simply increased her want, and she answered, ‘Yes! Yes, I love it!’

For an instant the blows ceased, and his hand cupped her cunt, squeezing lightly. ‘Good girl,’ he praised. ‘You’ll love it more, before I’m done with you.’
And then the spanking began in earnest, and Hermione surrendered herself to it, losing herself in the pleasureful pain, no longer trying to understand why she needed it, only yielding to euphoria, which moved her swiftly to tears. She cried because she loved the sensation, because she had deprived herself of it needlessly, because she needed these attentions from him, because her tears cleansed her of all the negative thoughts and feelings which poisoned her mind and heart.

When at last the spanking ceased, the spanking hand moved seamlessly to fingering pleasure, seeking out and finding her clitoris, and she was almost disappointed as, within seconds, the powerful pulse of her orgasm ripped through her, moving her from crying to sobbing.

Effortlessly, he turned her in his arms, so that he cradled her against his body with one arm, whilst the hand of the other arm—his wand arm—cupped her quim as he rocked her. She clung to him, breathing in the scent of his self-made aftershave and convulsively rubbing her fingertips over the incredible softness of his cashmere jumper.

As she was cuddled upon his lap, completely safe and sated, she became aware of the hardness under her bum, and she realised she was sitting atop his rock hard erection. Experimentally, she shifted her bottom, and he reacted with a jerk of his hips and a low, dark chuckle.

‘Behave yourself,’ he rumbled into her hair, ‘or you won’t get another orgasm.’

Her head came up at that, and he smirked down into her face. ‘I don’t think …’ she began, but the hand cupping her squeezed, and she made a humming noise and pressed against him.

‘Precisely so,’ he said, slipping two fingers inside of her and beginning to pump slowly in and out. ‘I think it’s a special day, today, and that you deserve to come again.’ The thumb of the pumping hand lightly grazed her clitoris, and she shuddered in pleasure. ‘Don’t you think so?’

‘Please,’ she moaned, swirling away again in a tide of desire.

‘That’s my girl,’ he told her, pumping and stroking.

She squirmed beneath his touch, rising for more, then squirming again, following nothing but the dictates of her body’s quest for climax—but her actions affected him, as well, which was evidenced by the jerk of his hips against her bottom. Hermione thrilled with power as his wicked fingers teased her towards another orgasm. She had made his cock hard—had him grinding against her like a fourth-year with a willing girl on the Astronomy Tower—she was determined to capitalise on her advantage.

Wantonly, she spread her thighs wider and thrust upward against the fucking fingers before lowering her hips and grinding against the erection pressed against her arse.

‘Minx,’ he gasped, but his hips jerked against her again, and this time he made no effort to restrain himself, but ground against her with a grunt of pleasure.

The eternity of the next several minutes could have gone on forever, in Hermione’s mind, and she would have been in rapture for all time. They established a mutually satisfactory rhythm of thrust, grind, stroke, thrust, grind, stroke, until they were straining together, both panting, intent on pleasure. He fucked her cunt with fingers curled to hit her vaginal wall just so, and his entire palm rubbed in a circular motion over the swollen, slick folds surrounding her clitoris, driving her higher and higher into a pleasure which transcended rational thought.
But such pleasure cannot be prolonged forever; there comes an end of all such delights. Pushed to
the edge of ecstasy, she fell, crying out, through wave after wave of completion. Still, her incoherent
sounds were soft enough that she clearly heard him gasp, '<i>Hermione</i>,' before wrapping her
completely in arms like iron bands and thrusting one last time against her body, the shudders of his
body echoing hers until they clung together, spent.

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Chapter 9 - The Journal

Hermione pressed her cheek to her Potions master’s chest, listening to his racing heart as it slowed in the aftermath of his orgasm. She held fists-full of the midnight blue cashmere jumper in her hands, and her breathing was still ragged, as was his, in the wake of their unorthodox—but undeniable—lovemaking. A divine lethargy, unlike any feeling she had ever known, was stealing through her limbs, and she lay limply upon him, feeling positively boneless in her satiation and contentment. Wordlessly, he Summoned the emerald green throw and wrapped it around her, and they sat in the glow of the fire as their breathing and heart rates slowed in tandem.

Hermione had begun to doze against him when he spoke to her.

‘Are you all right?’ he inquired.

She hummed in response, rubbing her cheek against the softness of his jumper.

‘Can you stand?’

Hermione didn’t want to stand, but she also didn’t want to displease him. ‘I think so,’ she said, and he assisted her to slide from his lap onto her feet. He sat forward and smoothed down her skirt, his brow furrowed with concentration, and then he stood, as well, straightening her jumper over her blouse before stepping back from her.

‘You have two choices of where to keep your gift,’ he said, nodding to where the hairbrush rested on the sofa. ‘You may leave it here, for me to use upon you when I wish, or you may carry it in your book bag—but no one else can ever touch the hairbrush, Hermione, and certainly no one else can use it to brush their hair.’ He looked down at her sternly. ‘What will it be?’

Hermione loved the idea of carrying the hairbrush away with her, to use each night in her room before going to sleep—but she knew life could be unpredictable. What if some circumstance should arise which would require one of her friends—Ginny Weasley or Luna Lovegood or Parvati Patil—to open her book bag for some reason? If she were not there to prevent it, they would touch her beautiful silver hairbrush—who could resist the urge to do so?—and she would be in disgrace with her professor. No, it was too dangerous.

‘I’ll leave it here, please, sir,’ she replied, averting her eyes deferentially.

He voiced his approval. ‘Very well,’ he said. ‘Now, to other matters.’

Hermione’s head came up, then. What else on earth could he do or say tonight? She didn’t know if she was excited or dismayed at the notion he might wish something further of her. Her bum and quim were both sore, she was exhausted physically and emotionally, and as much as she craved his attention, she didn’t know if she could withstand much more of it tonight.

He turned from her and went to the bookshelf closest to the far end of the table, where he kept his writing implements. From that particular shelf, he picked up a green leather journal and glanced at her with raised eyebrows.

‘Oh!’ she said, hastening to join him.

One corner of his mouth quirked before he sobered and spoke again. ‘If I am to take you in charge and direct your development as a submissive, responsibility for your well-being then falls to me,’ he said soberly. ‘I take that charge very seriously, Hermione. Do you understand?’
‘Yes, sir,’ she responded promptly, wondering where this discussion was leading.

‘I will not overburden you with too much detail tonight; we will begin simply,’ he said. ‘We will begin, Hermione, with the basics. For the first time, when you leave this room, you will leave with instructions you are to follow outside of my presence. Are you prepared to obey me when I am not with you?’

Inexplicable warmth touched her, then enveloped her. He was asking her to think of him when she was away from him—didn’t she do that already, without his prompting? But the implication that in so doing, she would be obeying him, pleased her—and the idea that he, in turn, would be thinking of her, made her very happy, indeed.

‘Yes,’ she said, her voice a bit shaky with the tumult of emotion within her, ‘I am prepared to obey you when I’m away from you.’

The half-smile which meant she had pleased him touched his thin lips, and her heart flip-flopped in her chest. She had never seen him thus dishevelled, with his hair disordered, his jumper rumpled—and she knew for a fact there was a mess in his trousers, for which she was personally responsible—and in spite of his sallow complexion and his overly large, hooked nose, she found him devastatingly attractive. Get a grip! she scolded herself.

‘Good girl,’ he murmured, his enigmatic black eyes warm on her face. He opened the journal, and Hermione was surprised to see the pages empty—had she not, with her own eyes, seen him writing in it, on the night he had bent her over the table and spanked her with his belt? ‘This will be your daily journal,’ he informed her. ‘In it, you will record information; when you do so, what you write will appear in this journal’s twin, which is in my possession.’

Well, that explains that, she thought. ‘Yes, sir,’ she said aloud, showing him she was attending to him.

‘You will write in your journal every day, and you will record what you eat for each meal, including the amounts. You will record what time you go to sleep and what time you wake up. You will record when you study, what you study, and how many hours you devote to each subject.’

Hermione listened carefully, wishing that she already held the journal in her hands, so that she could write his instructions in it—or that he had permitted her to retrieve parchment and a quill from her bag, so that she could have recorded his words, verbatim. What if she forgot? Would he be displeased?

He extended the book to her, and she reached to take it from him, but he did not release it to her—instead, he looked into her eyes and said, ‘You will also make note of each time you touch yourself—how you touch your breasts, whether you pinch your nipples or roll them between your fingers, whether you rub your clit or fuck yourself with a dildo—and I want to know how long you masturbate and how many times you orgasm.’

Hermione swallowed, suddenly aroused when she had thought it was not possible for her body to respond to him again. He moved toward her then, and she didn’t know he had backed her up to the table until he set the journal aside and placed his hands at her waist, lifting her bum onto the table edge, all the while gazing into her eyes. She knew, then, that he had slipped into her mind, gently moving in the forefront of her memories, bathing in her feelings and emotions. For once, Hermione felt no impulse to push him away; their earlier intimacy had left her with such a strong feeling of connectedness that it seemed only natural for him to share her thoughts. She heard his approval of her willingness to allow him freely into her mind, and he stepped between her thighs, lifting her skirt to expose her quim to the air.
He spread her labia with the fingers of one hand, then wet the first two fingers of his other hand in
his mouth before feathering them over her clitoris, wringing a shudder from her. The slick fingers
continued down her cunt to dip inside her body, finding the warm wetness of her arousal, and gliding
back up to caress her pleasure centre. With each rotation of his fingers upon her clitoris, her
excitement increased, and with each increase of her excitement, the pupils of his eyes dilated a bit
more as he revelled in the shared emotion. Fleetingly, she wondered how it would be to have his
tongue in her mouth, teasing the tip of her tongue as his fingers teased her clitoris—then the hand
which had been holding her labia wide slipped down to take over the clitoral stimulation, dipping
low to gather the perfectly viscous slickness and to rub her with it, and the other hand entered her
body, fucking. Her professor stepped closer still, widening her thighs further, exposing her gaping
quim even more, and now his face was so close to hers that their noses nearly touched. She wanted
so desperately to kiss his mouth, but she was unable to break eye contact with him as he pleasured
her body, coaxing bliss from her cunt with clever fingers.

‘Such a good girl,’ she heard, but his lips had not moved; he spoke within her mind. ‘So passionate
—so willing … Come for me, Hermione—come now.’

And she did, her mouth gaping and gasping her completion as she spasmed another orgasm, her
thighs clamping convulsively on his hands, the force of the climax almost painful in its intensity.

He withdrew from her mind, then, and she sagged forward against him, her eyes closing. He gently
disengaged his hands from her quim and put his arms around her, his hands moving in a soothing
rhythm up and down her back. Hermione wrapped her arms about his torso and her legs about his
thighs, pulling him as close to her as possible, clinging and slowly coming down from the peak to
which he had driven her. As she did so, she noticed the unmistakeable erection pressed against her
belly, and she felt another thrill.

He might control her response to him, working it to his will, but her response to him, in turn,
controlled him—it was obvious to her. He was as driven to draw that response from her as she was
driven to respond. It was gratifying and comforting to know she was not in this unusual situation all
alone.

The clock on the mantelpiece chimed the hour, and counting the chimes, Hermione knew it was
eleven o’clock.

‘I do not like to rush your recovery, Hermione, but we have overstayed our time, a bit,’ he said into
her hair, bending his head down to hers to speak, his breath warm upon her cheek. ‘I do not want
you to be found out after curfew in this state. You must prepare to return to your room, now.’

He released her and stepped back from her, and Hermione slid unsteadily from the tabletop to her
feet. ‘I’ll need the loo,’ she said, and he inclined his head in acquiescence. Resisting the urge to run
an appreciative hand over the subsiding bulge in his trousers, she walked to the bathroom door,
feeling his eyes warm upon her back as she did so.

All in all, it had been a most satisfactory Hallowe’en—in the end, she was not at all sorry to have
missed the feast, for she had enjoyed a feast of her own, replete with the uninterrupted attentions of
the most fascinating, powerful wizard of her acquaintance.

She was one lucky witch.
Chapter 10 - The Wager

Hermione used her new journal faithfully. It was a testament to Professor Snape’s forethought that knowing she would have to report her consumption made her eat more regularly and more carefully. The boys were happy to see that she was eating again and looking better—to the point that they ceased to see anything different about her and began to look right through her, again. Hermione had no problem with that, really; she had her journal, which she kept locked in her bedside table, and she had her luscious secret, which no one could take from her.

Sleeping properly and eating nourishing food returned to her the energy and focus she had always devoted to her studies, and she began to fly through her class work again. She smirked to herself as she thought how appalled Professor McGonagall would be to have to thank Professor Snape for the Head Girl’s improvement in Transfiguration.

Professor Snape remained as he had ever been with her in his classroom, and Hermione was fine with that. Knowing that he was reading her daily accounts of sleeping, eating, and—simultaneously the most exciting and most appalling—masturbating, she was assured of his attention, and for now, it was enough.

The next Saturday, the Gryffindor Quidditch season began with their annual grudge match against Slytherin. Ever the good, supportive friend, Hermione wrapped herself in her House scarf and made her way down to the Quidditch pitch in the crisp November weather. It was a cold, dry day, the sky with the sheen of a pewter cup. Walking along with her hands in her pockets, her eyes upon the ground and her thoughts far from Quidditch, she first became aware of him by his scent—he was wearing his aftershave.

Her heart began to beat faster, and she glanced casually to her left, where she saw his hawkish profile. His hair blew lightly back from his face in the chill breeze, and he scowled straight ahead, as if unaware of her proximity. He walked close enough to facilitate conversation, but not close enough for it to appear that they walked together.

‘Do not appear to be conversing with me, Miss Granger,’ he said, his lips scarcely moving.

‘Certainly not, sir,’ she replied, returning her eyes to watching the ground at her feet, euphoria beginning to bubble in her tummy.

‘I am surprised that you would take time from revising to watch your little friends lose at Quidditch,’ he sneered.

‘My friends are no longer little, sir,’ she replied, ‘and I do not believe they will lose at Quidditch.’ Hermione licked her lips nervously, hoping that she had read his mood correctly—that he desired her participation in this bit of banter—that she would not be punished for impertinence or for arguing.

‘And what would you be willing to wager on the outcome of this sporting event?’ he inquired, his tone taunting.

‘What would be appropriate?’ she asked curiously.

‘If Slytherin wins, you pleasure yourself in my presence, at my direction, for my entertainment. If Gryffindor wins, you receive a spanking with the implement of your choice.’ His tones were clipped, precise; he did not sound at all as if he were speaking to a student about perverse sexual practices.
‘You’re on, sir,’ she said, daring a glance at his face again, but she was disappointed. His expression was unwavering as he glared into the distance. ‘When would the loser make payment?’

‘The sooner the better,’ he replied. ‘My study, tonight, directly after dinner.’

They reached the stands and their ways parted, for he would sit with the teachers, and she would sit with her Housemates.

‘And don’t be late!’ he hissed as he turned away. ‘I have a later engagement in the village and do not wish to be delayed.’

Hermione stared after his retreating back, feeling as if she had been struck, and not in a pleasant way. He had an engagement? He was going to see Taffy-the-cow after being with her?

She scowled fiercely, frightening a group of first-years into scattering before her, allowing her passage through their ranks. We’ll just see about that, Professor, she thought angrily as she took a seat on the end of the bench with the other seventh-year Gryffindors.

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Hermione entered the professor’s office just after six o’clock that evening. She had waited at dinner until she saw him leave the staff table before excusing herself, pleading an excess of Arithmancy homework, and leaving her friends still at table in the Great Hall. It was not until the secret doorway behind his desk glowed green that she realised she was still wearing her clothes from the Quidditch match—trainers, jeans, a long-sleeved tee-shirt beneath a jumper, and her underwear, of course—but how on earth was she to lift her skirt if she wasn’t wearing one? Perhaps she could go back to her room and change …

‘Enter,’ he said, his voice carrying from across the room. Damn! Hermione thought. Do I risk going to my room and hope he’ll be glad to see me when I come back? Or go in and hope he’ll understand?

‘Last chance, Hermione,’ he said, and her eyes darted to the doorway, where he now leaned against the jamb, his arms crossed over his chest. He wore—dear Merlin—a tight white high-necked jumper which emphasised the relative breadth of his chest as compared to his slender torso.

Her mouth went dry, and her mind went blank as she stared at him, wondering how he had managed to shower and change so quickly. His hair, still damp, was combed straight back from his brow; he looked completely different when the inky tips of his hair brushed over his shoulders in this light-coloured jumper, rather than his habitual dark colours.

What was it about this man that struck her dumb with inchoate desire?

‘Hermione,’ he said, and she knew from his tone that his patience was waning.

Scuttling gracelessly across the floor, she squeezed past him, taking a deep breath of the scents of his soap, shampoo, and toothpaste before stopping just past him and staring at the floor. She heard the door close, but she did not raise her eyes; she still did not know what she would say to him about the way she was dressed.

‘Perhaps you would care to enlighten me as to why you would enter my study in this state of dress, Hermione.’

Hermione swallowed and dared to raise her eyes to his. ‘I was so excited to be coming back, I forgot
to change my clothes,’ she answered honestly.

He studied her carefully, his face unreadable. After a moment, she averted her eyes again, squirming inside with discomfort. How could he make her feel so small with so little effort? Why did she offer herself up for it?

*Because you like it,* the snide voice in her head reminded her.

‘I see,’ he said.

Hermione stared at the rug upon the floor, and it was so quiet she could hear the ticking of the clock upon the mantel. It seemed she stood there forever, before she peeked up at him from the corner of her eye, and he caught her at it, raising one sardonic eyebrow interrogatively.

‘Yes?’ he said.

‘What are we going to do, sir?’ she asked in a small voice.

‘What do you think we should do, Hermione?’

Well surely even his displeasure would be better than all this standing around in silence! She spoke all in a rush. ‘You said if Gryffindor won I could have a spanking with the implement of my choice, and I choose my hairbrush!’

He nodded. ‘This is, indeed, good information for me to have,’ he said. ‘But you are not appropriately attired for my study, are you, Hermione?’

‘No, sir,’ she agreed.

‘What do you think we should do about that?’ His tone was patient and judicious, but Hermione wasn’t interested in those calm characteristics. She wanted heat and excitement and his hands upon her body.

‘I could promise not to forget again?’ she suggested.

‘I think that might be part of the solution,’ he agreed. ‘But it will not suffice to remedy the situation, will it?’

Hermione felt like stomping her foot in impatience. ‘Well, sir, what will?’ she demanded.

‘Strip,’ he replied curtly, turning and walking away from her.

‘N-naked?’ she stuttered. She had never been completely naked in the presence of anyone—not in her memory, not since she had been old enough to remember it. Even her own mother accorded her more privacy than that!

He stopped at the fireplace and began to stoke the fire with an iron poker. ‘Do you find a fault with that arrangement?’ he inquired dangerously.

‘I could just strip from the waist down,’ she bargained desperately.

‘If you insist upon having your own way in this, Hermione, you may not find the spanking to your liking.’

He placed the poker back in its stand and turned to her with narrowed eyes. ‘Jeans and knickers off,’ he ordered tersely. ‘Then bend over the table.’
‘B-but ..’ she began, wondering how the bet she had won—and the spanking she was free to choose—had got away from her.

‘Obey me or leave!’ he thundered at her. ‘I am out of patience with you!’

With trembling hands, Hermione unfastened her jeans; she toed off her trainers and stepped out of her jeans and knickers in one go. Instinct told her to cover herself with her hands, but she knew it would anger him. She hurried to the table and bent herself over it, immediately feeling the magical bonds fasten about her wrists as they had done before. She looked into the imperfect mirror of the glass wall and saw Professor Snape stride up behind her and begin to unfasten his belt.

‘B-but I asked for my hairbrush!’ she cried, remembering how the belt had stung … and how he had buried his face in her slick quim and licked her and sucked her clit until she had all but lost her mind …

‘Be silent,’ he hissed at her. ‘You are in no position to be asking for leniency.’

Hermione subsided, realising that she had seriously displeased him, and wracked her brain to sort out how she had taken a fun occasion and turned it so quickly into a rather frightening one.

‘Number one,’ her professor said, ‘you came into my study—the room you have agreed to enter with your skirt lifted and your cunt exposed—wearing completely unacceptable attire.’

He struck her bum with the belt, and she gasped aloud.

‘Count, Hermione. I want you to count each time I hit your bottom.’

‘One,’ she said, and he struck her again. By the fifth blow, she was crying, as much from the humiliation as the discomfort. She was confused and upset, and she wanted to be anywhere but here.

When she said, ‘Ten,’ he stopped, slightly out of breath, and spoke to her again.

‘Number two,’ he continued, and she cried harder, realising her ordeal was not at an end. ‘You argued when I gave you a direct order, when you have agreed that in this room, you will do as you are told without question.’

The belt rose and fell again upon her bottom, and she bit her lip not to cry out.

‘You will count again, Hermione, beginning at “one”.’

So she cried and counted as he spanked her bottom with the belt. She hadn’t been thinking about the promises she had made to him before when she came here tonight—she had been thinking about how he had spanked her and pleased her. She had not given a single thought to their understanding, or to their agreed-upon relative positions in this relationship. She had thought only of her arousal, her excitement, her need—not at all about submitting to his authority or his will—she really hadn’t thought about him at all, except as the sure source of her sexual satisfaction.

When she said, ‘Ten,’ he paused again, more out of breath still, and spoke one last time.

‘You need not count for the next several spanks, Hermione. You may simply cry, and think about what you wish to say to me when your spanking is over.’

The belt fell upon her stinging bottom again, and she allowed herself to sob, knowing she had been thoughtless and selfish, disobedient and disrespectful, and wholly undeserving of his time and
attention. He smacked her bum with the belt only five more times, but Hermione sobbed as if her heart would break, feeling the utter devastation of disappointing him.

Her wrists were released, and she was magically swathed in the blanket, then levitated to the couch, where she was permitted to sit beside him. He did not touch her, but he supplied her with his handkerchief and waited for her to stop crying. It was hard to stop; he had become the focal point of her life. Even her eating, sleeping, and revising had become focused around him and the journal she kept for his perusal—what was she going to do when he told her to get dressed and never come back? How was she going to deal with being dismissed as a submissive in training before she had properly begun?

And why—why—wouldn’t he touch her?

When at last she stopped crying, Professor Snape passed her another clean handkerchief for a final mop-up and followed that with a glass of water. Hermione gulped the water down, wondering if she had cried so much as to become dehydrated. Finally, she returned the empty glass to him and cleared her throat.

‘May I speak?’ she asked, staring down at her hands.

‘You may,’ he concurred.

‘I apologise,’ she said softly. ‘I was thoughtless and disrespectful.’ Her voice broke on the last word, and she was choked up again, tears falling silently from her eyes onto the blanket, only to be absorbed by the closely woven fibres.

Professor Snape raised his wand. ‘Accio Hermione’s clothes and shoes,’ he said. When the items dropped into his lap he extended them to her. ‘Get dressed,’ he said quietly. ‘The healing oil for you to add to your bathwater is on the table.’

Still silent, Hermione did as she was told, all thought of modesty completed forgotten. She fastened her jeans and stuffed her feet into her trainers, tears blinding her. When she was dressed, she tried to say good-bye, but her throat would not permit the words to pass, so she pocketed the phial of oil and turned to go.

‘You may leave, of course,’ Professor Snape said, his voice thoughtful, ‘but you may wish to hear what I have to say before you go.’

Hermione stopped in her tracks and turned back to him, wiping ineffectually at her swollen eyes with the sleeve of her jumper. With a shake of his head, her professor stood and walked to her, conjuring yet another handkerchief, which he gave to her.

‘Do you wish to continue with me as your mentor in learning to be a submissive, Hermione?’

Her heart turned over in her chest—was there a possibility, then, that he would let her come back again?

‘Y-yes,’ she gasped.

‘Then you must follow my instructions for the next week to the letter. Do you understand me?’

Wordless, she nodded.

‘You will not touch yourself sexually for the next seven days,’ he said sternly. ‘You will deny yourself release as atonement to me for your disrespectful attitude. Are you willing to do that?’
She nodded her head, hope stuttering in her chest, depriving her of breath. She had never felt less like bringing herself off than she did right now. Thinking too much about that had made her reckless and thoughtless and had nearly cost her the most important thing in her life … her relationship with her professor. Yes, she could easily go without touching herself for seven days.

‘When you come back to this room in seven days, I will use Legilimency to make sure you have been truthful with me, so don’t even think about trying to deceive me.’ His eyes flicked over her without pity, his face showing no emotion. ‘You will continue to follow the other instructions concerning sleeping, eating, and revising. In place of details of your masturbation, you will instead write one thousand words each night before you go to sleep telling me why you want to be a submissive.’ He looked down dispassionately into her face. ‘Right now, I see virtually no evidence of your previously expressed interest in this training, Hermione, and if you do not intend to apply yourself to it, then I will find a more rewarding way of spending my time.’

Hermione nodded her head fervently. He was not sending her away—he was going to give her a chance to make it up to him—anything was better than not being permitted to see him again.

‘Thank you, sir,’ she managed.

‘You may go, now,’ he said, turning away from her.

Hermione fled his presence, a mass of desperation, hope, and determination.
Chapter 11 - The Reckoning

Excerpts from the Journal of Miss Hermione Granger:

Sunday, 9 November

The dictionary definitions of “submissive” and “submission” all have to do with the surrender of power or control of one’s self or actions to another. I find that idea very appealing, for a variety of reasons, but the most compelling one may be because it makes me feel weak with want.

Monday, 10 November

The other girls who live in my dormitory worry all the time about making themselves attractive to boys. They worry about their hair and their make-up and their clothes. I have always scorned that behaviour. Yet for the first time in my life, I find that I want to make myself attractive to a Dominant man, and that has caused me to consider how I would go about it. It occurs to me that the Dominant cares much less about the outward adornment of the submissive than about her readiness to yield her will to his. Perhaps he finds averted eyes, respectful silence, and prompt compliance to his requests to be far more alluring than stylish clothing and expensive cosmetics.

Wednesday, 12 November

I want to submit. I want to empty myself of my own overweening agenda and lay myself completely open to the will of a Dominant—yes, to be used for his pleasure, therein receiving my pleasure, as well—but also to be relieved of the burden of decision for that period of time. I want to be the blank canvas upon which a Dominant, in whom I have complete trust, will paint scenes in which I may spend times of fulfilment and contentment.

Friday 14 November

I am not a weak woman. I am intelligent, I am capable, and I am confident in my abilities. Yet when I consider yielding my will to the control of a trusted Dominant, I am liquid with desire. I wish to be disciplined to his service, and in so doing, to transcend everyday life for that slice of bliss which sustains me.

Hermione finished re-reading her last journal entry and put her journal away, locking it safely in her bedside table. She had returned to her room after eating a hurried dinner in the Great Hall and washed carefully before changing into a skirt and pulling her school robes on over her clothes. Her heart pounded in her chest as she walked down the staircases from Gryffindor Tower to the dungeons. She was desperate to see him again, for though she had seen him in the past week, she was fairly sure he had not seen her. At every meal, his eyes were elsewhere when she looked to the staff table, and in his classroom, he neither looked at nor spoke to her—not even to taunt her potion-making abilities. It was very strange of him, and it made her very uncomfortable.

There were a few people in the entrance hall as she moved to the dungeon stairs, but it was no one she knew, so she did not have to explain her destination. As she approached his office, breathing became more difficult, and she wiped her damp palms on her robes before knocking on his office door. She was relieved when the door opened to admit her to his darkened office, and she immediately slipped her robes off and stashed them beneath his desk. She had just enough time to snatch her skirt up and tuck it into the waistband before the secret doorway glowed green, and the
door swung open.

‘Enter,’ he said, and Hermione slipped through the doorway and stopped, willing her racing heart to slow so that she would be able to hear him over the pounding in her ears.

He sat at the table, writing in the green leather journal which she recognised as the twin of hers. He wore the forest green jumper, and his damp hair glistened like a raven’s wing beneath the oil lamp over the table. Her eyes drank him in hungrily, but he did not look up; his quill scratched over the page, and all Hermione could do was stand and wait with slightly shaking hands.

The ticking of the clock was testament to the passing of time, and soon enough, her heart rate slowed, as did her breathing. She realised he was testing her, and she willed herself to acceptance. He had given her a great deal of pleasure and had asked for little in return other than respect and obedience.

The clock on the mantel chimed the half-hour before Professor Snape laid down his quill and looked at her. She immediately averted her eyes, though it felt as if her heart had tripped and fallen to her feet.

‘Good evening, Hermione,’ he said quietly.

‘Good evening, sir,’ she replied softly, darting a small smile at him before lowering her eyes again.

He stood and crossed the room to her in three quick strides; as he drew near, she caught his scent, and she shivered with the pleasure of it.

‘Have you followed my instructions?’ he asked, standing very close to her.

‘Yes, sir,’ she said, resisting the urge to wipe her sweat-damp palms on her skirt.

‘You have not touched yourself sexually?’ he asked her.

‘I have not,’ she agreed, staring at the gloss of his boots.

‘Look into my eyes, Hermione—let me see.’

She raised her face willingly, glad of the opportunity to study him close-up—but he was immediately in her mind, and she was taken up with his perusal of her memories. It appalled her that he began on the day of the Quidditch match. He watched their conversation as they walked to the pitch, feeling her excitement and euphoria, experienced her anticipation leading up to their meeting, and the utter desolation she felt as he expressed his displeasure. Next he went through each day between now and then, dipping into taste her emotions as well as exploring her actions. At last, he released her mind, and she immediately felt his absence as a loss.

He stepped back from her. ‘I have enjoyed your journal entries regarding your thoughts on submission, Hermione,’ he said, his tone warmer now that he had verified the truth of her assertion that she had obeyed his instructions. ‘Am I correct in understanding that you trust me?’

Hermione swallowed and felt her face flush. How odd that she could stand before this man with her private parts uncovered without blushing, but one slightly personal word had her colouring up like a firstie. ‘Yes, sir,’ she said.

He reached a hand into his trousers pocket and withdrew a silky black handkerchief. ‘Will you permit me to blindfold you, Hermione?’
A very distant alarm rang through her mind. *What sort of idiot allows a Slytherin to blindfold them, Hermione?* Harry’s voice shouted, but she pushed it away. Submission to his will meant unquestioning trust. ‘Please, sir,’ she said, and he stepped behind her, deftly flipping the cloth to a long strip before placing it over her eyes and knotting it at the back of her head.

‘Good girl,’ he breathed into her ear, stirring her hair against her cheek, and her quim flooded with an aching warmth.

Had he forgiven her?

‘Come with me,’ he told her, and he took her hand, leading her across the floor. ‘You may sit,’ he said and guided her to the floor, where she settled herself upon a cushion. She felt the warmth of the fire upon her front, and as he settled behind her, bracketing her with his knees, she realised she was sitting at his feet before the sofa. ‘May I brush your hair?’ he asked, and Hermione felt as if she had melted into a lump of pure happiness. Had he not said that Dominants conferred such acts upon submissives when they were pleased?

‘Yes, please, sir,’ she said, surrendering herself to the bliss of his hands upon her hair.

‘I was very pleased that you so readily understood your error upon our last meeting,’ he said, beginning at the bottom of her hair and gently moving the bristles through it. ‘So many young submissives forget themselves in the flush of their sexual need, but you reasoned through to the correct answer on your own, Hermione. I was mightily impressed by that.’

She revelled in his words, as well as the touch of his fingers upon her scalp, smoothing along in the wake of the brush. She wanted to ask questions, but he had not invited her to do so, and she was uncertain whether it was permitted. Succumbing to his voice and hands, she relaxed into one of his strong, long legs, her cheek pressed blissfully to his knee, as if she could not hold her head up unaided.

‘Sometimes, a Dominant will help the submissive to focus her attention on particular stimuli by depriving her of her other senses—in this case, we are using a blindfold.’ His fingertips strayed from her hair onto her cheek before lightly stroking over her covered eyes. ‘Sensory deprivation can be a useful tool in many ways, but tonight we are restricting your sight so that you can more fully enjoy physical sensation.’

A moment of silence fell, although his hands did not vary their brushing and stroking of her hair, so Hermione said, ‘Thank you, sir,’ her voice sounding sleepy, for she was relaxed almost into a comatose state.

‘Do you like the blindfold, Hermione?’ he asked, his head now lowered very close to hers, his breath redolent of toothpaste.

‘Yes, sir,’ she breathed, turning her face towards his, her heart racing at the mere notion that her lips might touch his face.

‘Let’s see,’ he said, and she felt his chest press against her shoulder as he reached down, seeking and finding her exposed quim. He slid his fingers deep, past her wanton nub into the slick pool at her opening, then he stroked up, rubbing a gentle circle around her pleasure centre. ‘Oh, you do like it,’ he purred, and she arched her neck, groaning aloud to have his fingers in her quim again. He chuckled, a low, dark sound which resonated within her body like a pealing bell. ‘Are you ready now to claim the spanking you won last week?’

Even as he asked the question, he was straightening up, away from her, and she was twisting her
body around, following him.

‘Come on, then,’ he said, and she clambered into his lap, struggling to situate herself by touch alone. ‘Eager little slut, aren’t you?’ he said, his tone teasing … almost affectionate. It was almost as if her blindness freed him to more expressions of personal interest—or was it that her own attitude adjustment helped her to perceive his actions differently?

He flipped her skirt up, exposing her naked bottom to the cold air, and his right arm pulled her properly across his lap, just the way he had done before. Hermione shuddered with anticipation, feeling an emotion of powerful need, seasoned with the equally powerful feeling of being in her proper place, thus situated over her professor’s knee—of being home.

‘You asked for your hairbrush, didn’t you, little one?’ he asked, now cupping her cunt with his left hand and giving it a squeeze.

‘Yes, please,’ she cried, need overcoming the careful decorum she had maintained to this point.

The smooth, cold back of her hairbrush stroked over her flesh as he chuckled again, leaning over her, his lips very near her ear. ‘That’s right, Hermione—let the sensations overtake you—let the blindfold do its work.’

And the first blow of the hairbrush back slapped her arse, startling a low moan of pleasure from her throat, almost like a cat in heat.

‘That’s my girl,’ he purred, bringing the hairbrush down on her other cheek. ‘Just let it go.’

Deprived of sight, Hermione was reduced to her remaining senses: the divine stinging blows upon her bottom, translating seamlessly to molten need in her cunt; the sound of the brush impacting her body and of her professor’s disturbed breathing; the smell of her own arousal upon the hand which clamped her torso to him and of the wood smoke rising up the chimney into the cold autumn night; the rough weave of the sofa upholstery beneath her knees and against her cheek—and best of all, the proud, insistent hardness of his straining erection against her side. Sweet Merlin, it made him hot to take her over his knee and spank her bum, and surely she could use that to her advantage, somehow.

And then he moved into the next phase of her spanking, the blows landing harder and faster upon her buttocks, and there was no more coherent though, only feeling and reacting. Tears began to fall from her eyes—tears of thankfulness that he would spank her, and tears of release, as she was transformed into an empty vessel to be filled.

When he set aside the hairbrush, she lay weeping over his lap, and he immediately began to massage an oil into the skin of her bottom. It reduced the sting significantly, but did nothing for the torrent of need he had created within her. Slowly, her tears dried, and she pushed her bottom into the hand with the oil, deriving what pleasure she could from the contact of his hand upon her flesh.

Still wordless, he shifted her so that she was cradled in his lap, his strong right arm holding her against his chest, her face in the crook of his neck. His left hand stroked gently over her belly, just above the apex of her thighs, and she had the strong feeling he was looking at her, though whether at her face or her private parts she could not say. She shifted experimentally on his lap and ascertained that his erection was still present, if less rampant than when he had been spanking her. With a purr of pleasure, she positioned herself and ground her bottom against the hardness.

‘No more of that, little one,’ he said, and although he was reproving her, he did not sound angry. ‘Instead, open up your legs for me, and show me your hot little cunt.’ The hand stroking her belly slipped down to spread her labia, and she spread her thighs wider with a whimper. ‘That’s right,’ he
encouraged her. ‘Don’t you want to come for me?’

‘Yes,’ she gasped, and he slid a finger inside of her, pumping it in, out, and in again.

‘Yes what?’ he whispered into her hair, adding a second finger to the one fucking her.

‘Yes sir,’ she cried, bucking up against his hand.

‘I’m very pleased with you, Hermione,’ he said, allowing his thumb to circle her clitoris as his fingers continued their in and out motion. ‘How many times can you come for me?’

She clutched at him, pressing her face against the side of his neck. ‘I don’t know,’ she said, raising her hips to press against his hand.

‘Well, our time isn’t unlimited,’ he said, ‘but let’s see what we can do.’

Thirty more seconds of his thumb expertly rubbing her clitoris brought her to a shuddering climax in his lap, and he wrapped both arms about her as she came down from it, rocking her and praising her. Soon, he was gently rubbing his hand down her flanks, then her thighs, pausing to cup and squeeze her mound at intervals.

‘I want to lick your cunt, little one,’ he murmured into her hair. ‘Will you let me do that for you?’

‘Oh God—yes, please,’ she moaned, earning one of his laughs.

He levitated her then, rising and moving with her across the room, until she was on the tabletop.

‘Scoot back a bit, so you can put your heels on the edge of the table,’ he instructed her, and Hermione complied, pleased when he cast a Cushioning Charm on the top of the table, making her more comfortable.

She felt movement near her feet, which were resting on the surface, her knees raised, and then his large, warm hands were upon her thighs, opening her legs, before moving to her cunt and opening her labia wide.

‘Did you like it before when I licked your clit?’ he asked, his breath warm upon her exposed parts.

‘Yes, I loved it,’ she admitted,

‘So did I,’ he said, and then his tongue was on her, light, tantalising licks, until she was hot again and aching for him. He seemed to read her whimpers, for he buried his nose in the curls and wrapped his lips around her clitoris, pulling it and the surrounding flesh into his mouth and flattening his tongue upon her. His lips moved convulsively to suck as his tongue tormented her with stroke after perfect stroke. She had her fingers tangled in his hair, thrusting wildly against his face when her orgasm came upon her, and he completely distracted her by choosing that moment to thrust two fingers deep inside her vagina. The tips of his fingers hit her sweet spot, once, twice, thrice, and she screamed, shattering into pieces on his study table, holding him so forcefully against her spasming cunt that later, she wondered how he had been able to draw breath.

‘Hermione,’ he groaned, almost as if in protest, and he scooped her off the tabletop onto his lap, settling her wide open, wet quim atop his erect prick and thrusting against her. She couldn’t see and could scarcely situate herself; her feet did not touch the floor, but she could grab the back of the chair in which he sat and steady herself as he thrust up and up and up, grinding his hips and speaking filthy, erotic words to her until he grunted and came in his pants, holding her hips in a vise-like grip as he gasped again, ‘Hermione.’
‘Close your eyes,’ he whispered into her hair, and she felt the blindfold being removed. She pressed her face into his neck, shivering in reaction. The concert of sensations and emotions through which he led her upon each meeting touched on the edge of overwhelming her—but that particular edge was becoming her favourite place in the universe, so she did not protest. She knew without a doubt that he would protect her and look after her—that he wanted to do it, just as much as she wanted it done—and that knowledge permitted her to sag, spent and peaceful, in his capable arms.

She felt the weave of the blanket against her skin as he wrapped her in it, his arms about her. There were no sounds in the study, save for the crackling of the fire in the hearth and the ticking of the clock upon the mantelpiece. Hermione cracked her eyes open experimentally and squinted a bit from the light of the oil lamp overhead. When her eyes focussed, she saw his midnight eyes, pupils indistinguishable from the inky irises, watching her intently.

‘Ought I to call you “Master”, now?’ she asked softly.

A slightly startled expression touched him before his usual passive mask dropped again, and he shifted his gaze to the impenetrable darkness of the glass wall. ‘No,’ he responded evenly. ‘A submissive has only one Master. It is a very close, intimate relationship, often exclusive. I am your mentor; you may even say that I am your Dominant, but it would be entirely inappropriate to the relationship we now have for you to call me “Master”.’

He spoke in a gentle, borderline classroom lecturing tone, but he was not scolding or reproving; he was instructing. Even so, Hermione felt slightly rebuffed … rejected. ‘Is it because you’re my teacher?’ she asked in a tiny voice, her gaze now fastened upon the green blanket.

‘No,’ he replied. ‘Certainly, the relationship we have now is entirely inappropriate between a teacher and student—that is not news to you, Hermione, is it?’

She shook her head once.

‘I ought never to have begun this with you, but as we have discussed, I was drawn to your submissive behaviour and your response to me.’ His fingertips stroked over her cheek, tucking a hank of bushy hair behind her ear, drawing her eyes back to his. ‘The Dominant craves the interaction as much as the submissive does, remember?’

She nodded, feeling her hurt dissolving beneath the warmth of his eyes upon hers.

‘Stress increases our need,’ he said, almost as if to himself. ‘We are, both of us, living through a stressful time …’

She worked her hand free of the blanket and cupped his cheek. ‘You had just returned from … a difficult encounter that night at Grimmauld Place, in the kitchen,’ she said, and he did not deny it. ‘Have you ever mentored a student before?’

Gently but definitely, he removed her hand from his face. ‘Perhaps we will discuss my experience as a Dominant at some point,’ he said, ‘but for now, it’s getting late.’

Hermione’s glance flew to the clock. ‘Oh, but it’s only eight o’clock!’ she protested, resting her cheek against him again. ‘Hours before curfew.’

He straightened in his chair, his posture becoming stiff, his lap, less welcoming. ‘Hermione,’ he said,
his voice still gentle, but with an underlying tone of warning, ‘it is important for you to learn to accept the boundaries I put in place for you. It is as much a part of your training as the punishments and the pleasure.’

Swallowing her disappointment as well as she could, she sat up, too, sitting like an upright wooden puppet upon his suddenly inhospitable knee. ‘I could probably climax again,’ she said, wondering if he could be sidetracked.

He chuckled and nudged her to her feet, immediately following suit. ‘I am sure you could,’ he said, the sexual purr in his tone drawing her hopeful gaze to his face, ‘but I am afraid I am expected elsewhere this evening, and I will have to save that treat for another time.’

Hermione pressed her lips tightly together to prevent herself from blurting out anything unfortunate. Another date with that Taffy cow? After all but fucking her?

How could he?

Blindly, she turned away from him, allowing the blanket to fall from her shoulders as she headed for the door.

‘Hermione,’ he said, and this time his voice held the unmistakeable tone of reproof.

Oh, how she wanted to fling herself out of this room and never return! How she wanted to turn and scream her hurt and rage into his hateful face!

Her eyes closed against the threat of tears, and her head sagged. She did not want to draw his wrath upon her again—did not want to spend an uncomfortable week fretting over whether or not she could win his forgiveness. She turned slowly said, ‘Yes, sir?’ staring at her feet.

‘Look at me,’ he commanded, and when she had raised reluctant eyes to him, he continued. ‘You are experiencing a natural reluctance to leave me,’ he said. ‘You lay down your will and submit yourself to me, you receive your reward, and together we enjoy quiet time afterwards. It is a perfectly understandable desire for you to want to stay—don’t be upset with yourself for feeling the way you do. But it is necessary to begin to discipline yourself to accept the fact that there will be an end to every encounter.’

Hermione heard his words and knew they were true, but it didn’t make her feel better. He understood how she was feeling and why better than she did, but he wouldn’t let her stay—he would prefer to spend the evening with the stupid bint from the apothecary shop—so she refused to be disarmed by his words. She didn’t care how perceptive he was—what she wanted was for him to prefer to spend the evening with her, rather than Taffy-the-slag.

She nodded once, to signify comprehension, and did not speak.

‘I see,’ he said, his icy tone indicating his displeasure with her response. ‘Then you may go.’

Hermione turned from him and fled into the office without speaking another word. She snatched her robes from beneath his desk and hurried down the dark dungeon corridor. She was in turmoil. Every time she was with him, all it did was make her want more. He was like a drug to which she was becoming addicted—a drug for which she had no guaranteed supply—and it was driving her mad.

She climbed the stairways up to the seventh floor, making and discarding plan after plan for avenging herself against her professor, until she was before the portrait of the Fat Lady—but Hannah Abbot was standing there, and she turned to Hermione excitedly.
'Hermione!' she cried. ‘It’s the prefect’s night out with the teachers!’ she said. ‘Professor McGonagall sent me to find you!’

‘I forgot!’ Hermione said.

Hannah looked her up and down. ‘I see that,’ she said. ‘What do you want me to tell McGonagall?’

‘Apologise to her and say I’ll be right there,’ Hermione promised, giving the password and bolting through the portrait hole.

Ten frantic minutes later, she slid across the entrance hall, dressed in clean, tight blue jeans and a vee-necked jumper without its usual high-necked tee-shirt underneath.

‘Sorry, Professor,’ she told her glaring Head of House as she fastened her heavy cloak. The other seventh-year prefects were gathered with Professors McGonagall and Flitwick for their monthly night out. It was meant to be a reward for service and an opportunity to discuss any problems away from the school. They usually went down to the village and had a Butterbeer or two in the Three Broomsticks—and with any luck, Professor Snape would be there with Taffy. Hermione meant to be as much of a distraction as possible.

The eight students walked down the road to the village, Malfoy and Parkinson holding themselves somewhat aloof from the others, their heads close as they whispered together. Hermione chatted freely with Professor Flitwick, her spirits soaring from depressed and angry to excited and reckless. She led the way into the Three Broomsticks, cheerfully calling a greeting to Madam Rosmerta as her eyes raked the room for her prey—there, with his blue-eyed, sweet-faced admirer—then she led the way to a large table, directly past the table hosting Professor Snape and Taffy-the-shop-girl.

‘Good evening, Professor Snape,’ McGonagall said coldly as she swept past his table.

Hermione, who had taken the seat with the best possible view of Professor Snape and his companion, was delighted to see the pained expression upon his face as he returned his colleague’s greeting.

‘Good evening, Severus,’ Professor Flitwick exclaimed in his squeaky voice. ‘And hello, Miss Smith,’ he added, stopping to bow to Snape’s companion. ‘It’s a lovely night to pop out for a bit of a nightcap, wouldn’t you say?’

Hermione couldn’t hear Taffy’s reply, but she saw Professor Snape’s sour expression, and it filled her with joy. They were crashing his date! She couldn’t have been happier.

Professor Flitwick joined the prefects and Professor McGonagall at their table, and the lot of them gave their drinks orders to the slightly harassed looking barmaid. Hermione ordered honey mead, which was a bit stronger than her usual Butterbeer, but she was feeling a bit wild, and frankly, she didn’t care.

From that point forward, she was the life of the party. Hermione had never been a social butterfly nor a flirt, but she made a point of joking with Ron and Ernie Macmillan and flirting outrageously with a surprised, but gratified, Anthony Goldstein. Professor Flitwick, accepting and gracious, enjoyed Hermione’s high spirits, but Professor McGonagall seemed a bit taken aback, and Hannah and Padma Patil spent their time talking to one another and ignoring Hermione’s antics. Malfoy and Parkinson sat at the far end of the table, responding politely when spoken to by one of the teachers, but otherwise keeping to themselves.

Even when she was standing to lean across the table and laughingly place the umbrella from
Professor Flitwick’s drink in Anthony’s Butterbeer bottle, Hermione kept a close watch on Professor Snape from the corner of her eye. She was delighted to note that his sour look did not abate, and every time her laughter rang out, his look of dark displeasure slid to her face. She was careful not to meet his gaze, for she knew that one admonitory shake of his head would have put an end to tonight’s entertainment; she would not have openly courted his annoyance, after all. But at this point in their relationship, there were no rules for her conduct outside of his study, other than his terse command that she was not to follow him when he left the castle. Well, this scarcely counted in that category, did it? She was Head Girl; it was her duty to attend these functions, which were clearly recorded on the teachers’ master calendar; if he forgot and brought his so-called date to the pub where the prefects were holding their monthly meeting, what fault was that of hers?

Besides, she felt giddy with power, knowing she was keeping her professor trapped in his seat. He would never have the nerve to leave the pub with his slag whilst a tableful of colleagues and students watched him.

Would he?

At half-ten, Professor McGonagall made noises about ending the outing, but Hermione had just successfully lured Professor Flitwick into a non-magical game of darts, and the excitable little Charms teacher was not at all eager to leave. ‘You go ahead, Minerva,’ he squeaked. ‘I’ll see Hermione safely back—and anyone else who wishes to stay and witness our contest!’

Unsurprisingly, all of the girls left with McGonagall, as did Malfoy; Anthony and Ernie stayed behind to watch the game, and Ron stayed behind to watch over Hermione, a scowl on his freckled face.

‘You’ve had too much to drink,’ he hissed at her when Professor Flitwick scurried forward to retrieve his darts. ‘Why are you acting like this?’

‘I’m fine, Ron,’ she insisted, noting the sardonic look on Professor Snape’s face as he observed their whispered conversation.

Professor Snape chose that moment to rise from his seat, courteously assisting his shop girl to place her cloak about her shoulders. Hermione noted angrily that the other woman was taller than she, with a narrower waist, and a flash of pure hatred pulsed through her.

‘Leaving so soon, Severus?’ Professor Flitwick called good-naturedly across the room.

Hermione could almost hear the professor’s teeth grind as he turned back to Flitwick. ‘It is quite late, Filius—perhaps you should conduct the students back to the castle?’

Flitwick chuckled. ‘I am engaged in a contest of skill with Hermione,’ he explained, holding the darts aloft. ‘We are playing without magic, you know—care for a flutter?’

Hermione waited breathlessly for Snape to say something devastatingly brutal about her skill, but he did not.

‘I must see Miss Smith home, Professor,’ he said. ‘Perhaps another time.’

Hermione felt her blood boil. He was doing it! In spite of all her efforts, he was leaving the pub to go home with that … that slut! She was torn between rage and a sick, twisting feeling in her stomach, and in a blinding flash, just as the pub door closed behind the departing figures of her professor and his companion, she recognised the emotion: She was jealous.

Bloody hell!
She was so distracted by her epiphany that she lost all concentration in her game of darts, and the agile, precise Professor Flitwick easily defeated her.

‘Better luck next time, my dear,’ he said cheerfully as he herded his charges out onto the dark road. ‘It was a delightful idea—I can’t remember when I’ve enjoyed an outing more.’

Ron and Ernie talked with Flitwick as they walked, their discussion of the dart match flowing quite naturally into a discussion of the Quidditch season at Hogwarts, but Anthony hung back a bit to walk with Hermione. She eyed him nervously, wondering why she had thought it would be a good idea to flirt with him so outrageously.

Within three minutes she was sincerely sorry she had done it. ‘I’m sorry, Anthony,’ she said, lying desperately, ‘but I already have plans for the next Hogsmeade weekend—maybe another time.’

Anthony, emboldened by what he must have perceived as a clear indication of interest on her part, next attempted to slide his arm around her as they walked along. Hermione jumped away from him, instinctively batting his arm down, which angered him.

‘What’s the problem with you, Granger?’ he demanded angrily. ‘I’d never heard you were a tease.’

‘I do hate to disrupt this touching scene,’ a silky voice proclaimed from behind them, ‘but perhaps you could upbraid Miss Granger at a later time, Goldstein.’

Hermione could not see Anthony’s face, but she imagined he would have been flushed angrily at being caught out in this situation by the least sympathetic teacher in all of Hogwarts. With an indistinct mutter, Anthony strode away from her, easily catching up with Ron, Ernie, and Professor Flitwick. Hermione tried to fight down the elation which had surged through her when she heard Snape’s voice—he hadn’t stayed with Taffy! He had come away! She had achieved her objective!

‘I ought to have let him tell you what you deserved to hear,’ Professor Snape said, taking Anthony’s place, striding along at her side. ‘You encouraged him shamelessly.’

Hermione thought it would be best not to answer. She had no defence for what she had done to Anthony.

‘Are you pleased with yourself?’ he asked conversationally.

She sensed that she was on dangerous ground. ‘Sir?’ she said, infusing her voice with just the right amount of confusion.

‘Don’t try the innocent act on me,’ he advised her in a mild tone. ‘Any untruth—any half-truth—would be discovered and punished, you know.’ He glanced down at her in the dark, his expression unreadable. ‘I would advise you to be honest.’

Hermione bit her lip, feeling her elation drain away, wondering what the punishment would be for crashing the date of one’s Dominant with another woman.

‘Well?’ he asked again, this time his voice whipping over her.

‘I was pleased,’ she said, ‘but now, I’m not.’

‘We shall discuss it,’ he said. ‘My study, tomorrow afternoon, directly after lunch.’

He was going to let her come back to see him so soon? Perhaps he would touch her—spank her—finger her—anything he did to her in his study would be wonderful, and it would be very, very
personal. ‘Yes, sir!’ she breathed, almost happy again.

‘I would not celebrate too soon if I were you,’ he said icily, and he lengthened his stride, passing her by and joining Professor Flitwick on the road back to Hogwarts.
Chapter 13 - Expectations

Author's notes: A/N: “I do not have unlimited leisure time.” This is a direct quote, from *Order of the Phoenix*, when Severus is taunting Sirius in Harry’s presence in the kitchen at Grimmauld Place.

Hermione was startled and more than a little apprehensive when she exited the Great Hall after lunch on Sunday afternoon, only to be intercepted by Professor Snape.

‘Ah, Miss Granger,’ he said coldly, gliding up to her before she and the boys had set foot on the marble staircase, ‘you may come with me, now, to discuss your detention.’

Hermione swallowed her annoyance and glanced at Harry and Ron. ‘I’ll see you later in the common room,’ she murmured.

Harry glared at Snape. ‘I thought your appointment was at one o’clock,’ he said to Hermione without taking his eyes from his most hated teacher. ‘It’s just past noon.’

‘Now will be more convenient for me, Miss Granger,’ Snape reiterated, ignoring Harry completely. ‘You may play with your little friends later. I shan’t need you for long.’

Embarrassed and worried, Hermione turned from all three of them and stalked away to the dungeon staircase; she heard the sweep of Professor Snape’s robes upon the stone steps and knew that he was following her. She walked as quickly as she could, stubbornly wanting to reach his office door sooner than he did. Before she could touch the doorknob or turn to speak with him, the door swung open, and she entered. He swept past her, closing the door with a snap of his wrist, and sat at his desk.

Hermione shifted nervously from one trainer-clad foot to the other. She had intended to go to her room and wash and change into her skirt before coming down here, but he had corralled her whilst she was still wearing her jeans and jumper. Would he insist that she strip down again? She had already decided that if he ever asked that of her again, she would comply without argument, and she began to steel herself for it.

‘Sit down, Miss Granger,’ he said, drawing her attention back to him.

He sat at his desk in full teaching regalia, as if this were not a Sunday, watching her with some impatience. Alarmed, Hermione sat in the chair he indicated.

‘I wished to catch you before you made any extensive preparations for our meeting this afternoon,’ he informed her. ‘I gave you very few instructions last night, and I have had more time to consider how I wish to proceed.’

He paused, watching her. Hermione tried to meet his gaze, but she was finding it difficult. Today, she did not seem to recognise him; he was neither her caring Dominant nor her sneering teacher. In fact, his detached, cool air filled her with misgiving. She was not sure how to respond to him, so she attempted to look attentive and remained silent.

His eyes were different today—like endless black tunnels which fell to an abyss. When he continued, he said, ‘For the purposes of our meeting today, the usual rules do not apply. You may enter, seat yourself, and speak freely. The only requirement is that you must remain respectful. Do you agree to these terms?’
Oh, this didn’t seem to be going well. Something was different—something had changed—and Hermione was not happy with that notion. Why couldn’t she find some solid ground with him?

‘Yes, Professor,’ she said, and the hidden doorway glowed green behind him.

‘You may enter,’ he said, and she obeyed him, crossing the room and choosing an armchair across from the sofa so that she could gaze out on the rippling green water through the glass window. She heard him enter, as well, and heard the rustle of fabric that usually meant he had removed his teaching robes. When he crossed before her, she saw she had been correct; he was now attired in his severe black coat and trousers. He sat down on the sofa, facing her, and she was found that she missed seeing him there in his more relaxed jumpers—the forest green one, perhaps. Everything seemed strange to her, and she didn’t like it at all.

He looked at her, the tip of one long finger tracing the contours of his thin lips. She endured his gaze, unsure of what was expected of her. She decided to wait to see what he would say. Deliberately, she took a deep breath and let it go, making a conscious effort to relax. She rested her hands loosely upon her thighs and waited.

When he spoke, his tone was musing. ‘Hermione, what do you expect of me?’

She started, not from surprise at the sound of his voice but from a bit of alarm at the question. Were submissives permitted to have expectations?

He continued, seemingly sincere in his request for information. ‘I have attempted to provide for you the things a submissive requires: structure, routine, discipline, pleasure, and a secure place in which to explore your needs and desires. Do you feel those objectives have been achieved?’

Hermione felt herself relax infinitesimally. This was an intellectual discussion. This was well within her comfort zone. She could easily take part in this dialogue.

‘Yes, sir; I do feel you have provided those things,’ she said softly, taking care to speak respectfully.

He nodded, as if he had expected this answer. ‘Then perhaps you could enlighten me,’ he said, and she was quick to detect the irony in his voice, ‘why you continually wish for more? Why you find it necessary to follow me from the castle, to make a spectacle of yourself for my benefit, and to attempt to interfere in my social life?’

The confidence which had begun to bloom just moments before leached from her as if she were a water balloon with a minute puncture. ‘I don’t know,’ she said, averting her eyes and twisting her hands together in her lap. She wasn’t about to tell him that she wished Taffy Smith did not exist.

‘Hermione,’ he said, his voice compelling her to meet his gaze. ‘This is your opportunity to share your thoughts with me,’ he pointed out. ‘You may speak freely to me now, and I would recommend that you do so—for it you do not, I will be forced to discontinue your training. I cannot assist you to meet your needs if I do not know what they are.’

One phrase from his statement snagged in her mind, like seaweed tangled in a bit of driftwood, and refused to be dislodged. I will be forced to discontinue your training. No! He couldn’t stop!

‘Sir!’ she gasped, suddenly on her knees at his feet. ‘Please—no!’

His dispassionate expression did not falter. ‘Please seat yourself,’ he said quietly, and the cool disinterest he displayed frightened her so much that tears began to track down her face.

She covered her eyes with her hands, wondering how things had got so bad so quickly. What could
she say to him? What did he want to hear? She couldn’t bear the notion of going through her days without the bedrock of his presence in her life to anchor her. In a very short period of time, he had become more important to her well-being and her peace of mind than anyone else she knew.

His tone sharpened. ‘I will not tell you again to seat yourself, Hermione. Disregard of this request will count as flagrant disrespect.’

Snivelling, she pivoted and crawled back up into her chair, her arms crossing protectively over the burning fear in her chest.

He spoke again. ‘Think. What do you want from me that I am not providing to you?’

She was going to have to tell him—to speak her thoughts out loud, no matter how stupid they were—or he would put her out. ‘I can’t bear it when you send me away and go to be with her,’ she admitted brokenly. Oh, how foolish it sounded! Speaking the words aloud, she felt more ridiculous than she had ever thought Lavender was on her worst day.

‘Are you referring to Miss Smith?’ he asked evenly.

‘Yes,’ she said, swiping the rough weave of her jumper across her wet eyes.

The cool, smooth square of a linen handkerchief was pressed into her hands, and she took it gratefully. He stood over her, and she glanced up to see the faintest tinge of amusement in his eyes.

‘You would prefer not to know when I am to see Miss Smith,’ he said.

Hermione’s lower lip trembled. ‘I would prefer you not to see her at all,’ she said in a small but resolute voice.

‘You understand, do you not, Hermione, that you have no say in whom I choose to see?’

She sighed deeply. ‘Yes, sir,’ she answered after a moment. Her head came up, and she added, ‘Just as you have no say in whom I choose to see.’

He resumed his seat on the sofa. ‘Correct,’ he confirmed. He resumed his study of her face, and she took another swipe at it with his handkerchief, hoping she didn’t look too horrid. ‘What else, Hermione?’ he prodded. ‘These negotiations between a Dominant and a submissive are rare—you ought to take full advantage of it, for it will not happen again.’

Her heart skipped a beat at the warning in his tone, and she realised her time was running out. She might as well shoot for the moon while he was willing to listen to her.

‘I don’t like being sent away after being intimate with you,’ she said, squirming inside. This speaking of her innermost thoughts to him was distressing, and in some ways, far more personal than having his fingers in her quim. ‘I would like to stay with you longer, afterwards—until curfew.’

His eyes narrowed, and he tilted his head slightly. ‘What do you propose to do with this extra time?’ he inquired. ‘I do not have unlimited leisure time.’

Hermione leant towards him, feeling an opening and wanting to press forward with her advantage. ‘It doesn’t matter,’ she said eagerly. ‘I could help you with your marking, or we could talk, or we could just sit by the fire and read …’

Her voice trailed off under the weight of his expressionless stare. Stupid, stupid! her inner voice railed at her. Why would he want to spend that kind of time with you?
‘Very well,’ he said quietly. ‘Any meetings I have with Miss Smith will not take place upon the same day when I have a meeting with you. In addition, you will be permitted to remain with me until your curfew on those nights when I spank you or make you come.’ His voice became quieter still, and she had to lean forward to hear him clearly. ‘I will make these two concessions to your needs, Hermione, because I take quite seriously my duty to see to your welfare—but I will require concessions from you in return.’

Yes? He said yes? She bounded from her chair, her exuberance carrying her across the space separating him, but the wall of his reserve stopped her at his knee, where she stood, beaming down at him idiotically.

‘Sit down,’ he said sternly, his serious demeanour unaffected by her delight.

‘Yes, sir,’ she murmured, sitting down again but unable to remove the fatuous grin from her face.

‘Your concessions with be as follows,’ he said, and Hermione instantly sobered, knowing that she would have to remember his words exactly if she wished to please him. ‘You will no longer have permission to masturbate and orgasm at the time of your choice. Your orgasms outside my presence will be under my control and will require my express permission. Is that clear?’

Hermione nodded, feeling slightly deflated. How, when she lived in Gryffindor Tower, was she supposed to get his permission to climax? By owl post?

‘You may request permission by writing in your journal,’ he said, as if reading her mind. ‘If you receive no response, the answer is “no”. If permission is granted, you will be able to read my answer in your journal.’

Her eyes widened. ‘You can write in my journal from down here?’ she asked. ‘I’ve never seen your handwriting in it before.’

‘Your journal will mirror my comments when I choose for it to do so,’ he informed her repressively. ‘In addition, I will occasionally give you special instructions for your day via your journal. It will be necessary for you to check it morning, noon, and night to be certain that you have not missed a communication from me.’ He lowered his eyes, and the sweep of his black lashes against his cheek struck her suddenly with incomprehensible desire. ‘Failure to complete an assignment, of course, will merit punishment.’

Hermione swallowed, her mouth now dry, and murmured her comprehension. She felt heat between her legs, and she shifted in her seat, all other rational thought deserting her. He glanced back at this, his pitiless black eyes piercing her like a laser, as if he were completely aware of her sudden flare of desire.

‘I have a book for you to read,’ he said, uttering the one phrase which might have distracted her successfully from the pulsing ache in her quim.

He stood and crossed to the bookshelf upon which he kept his twin to her journal, picking up a slim leather-bound book and returning to his place upon the sofa. ‘Come here,’ he said, his voice warming, now that their discussion was at an end.

Hermione gladly moved to sit beside him, taking the book he placed in her hands. She read the title:

_The Sensuous Symmetry of Submission_

_By Master Maximus and t_
‘I take it you’ve found precious little research material in the Hogwarts library,’ he said dryly.

‘Nothing at all about Dominance and submission,’ she answered, her attention riveted upon the book in her hands.

‘I have found this book quite instructive,’ he said. ‘In fact, I am now acquainted with the author and his submissive. When you leave school, I will provide an introduction to them for you. It will be an excellent way for you to find a Dominant to serve.’

Hermione pushed the meaning of those words away from her. She didn’t like it when he spoke of her leaving and finding another Dominant to serve. She didn’t want another Dominant … and besides, she had this lovely book to devour …

‘You may read the book when you are here, with me,’ her professor told her. ‘When you have finished reading it, we will discuss it, and then I will provide you with new material to read.’

She raised her face to his. ‘Oh please, sir, may I read for a while now?’ She didn’t know if she could bear to put the book aside without reading any of it.

He looked down at her, his expression unreadable. ‘Very well,’ he said. ‘I have some marking to do at the table, but if you are quiet, you may remain and read until teatime.’

Hermione placed her hand upon the black wool of his coat. ‘Thank you, sir—for everything.’

He nodded once and left her on the sofa, her nose already buried in the book.

The book began at the beginning, explaining the relationship between the Dominant and the submissive. Master Maximus would write a section, and then his submissive, t, who was also his wife, would write a section from her point of view. Hermione was completely fascinated by the complex emotions explained by Master Maximus; it excited her to imagine that her own professor might experience these same emotions. And when she read the sections written by t, the words resonated with her so deeply that it literally gave her chills.

She truly wasn’t alone in her feelings—there were other women who felt as she did, who revelled in relinquishing their power to a strong, capable man whom they trusted implicitly—and the sense of validation she felt was immense. She read through the first chapter, describing how Master Maximus and t had met, their relationship as Dominant and submissive, and how their commitment had evolved even to a traditional hand-fasting: t’s Dominant wizard was also her husband. The very idea left Hermione short of breath.

And the erotic play! Reading of the spankings, floggings, gentle humiliations, punishments, and other practices of which Hermione had never heard filled her with longing so acute that it was physically painful. The drawings which accompanied the descriptions, in true wizarding fashion, moved to demonstrate the techniques, and Hermione found herself turning back again and again to watch the face of the submissive as her Dominant blindfolded her, bound her hands, and whipped her back and bottom with a leather flogger. The submissive writhed beneath the treatment, clearly beyond herself with ecstasy.

The clock on the mantel chimed four o’clock, and Hermione reluctantly put the book aside. Rising, she walked over to her professor, whose head was bent over the stack of essays, his quill moving in steady spikes, leaving scratches of red ink over the students’ work. She stood serenely at his side, waiting for him to speak to her. At last, he set the quill upon the tabletop and turned his long, narrow face to her.
‘Well, Hermione?’ he asked.

She did not speak, but unfastened her belt, toeing off her trainers and stepping out of her jeans, knickers, and socks before tugging her jumper over her head. His onyx eyes watched her with polite attention as she released the catch between her breasts and shrugged her bra off her arms. Then she knelt upon the rug at his side, averting her eyes deferentially, just as the drawing in the book had depicted.

He made no sound, only pushing his chair back from the table so that he had a clear view of her submissive posture. ‘Your knees should be as far apart as your shoulders are wide,’ he murmured, and she adjusted her position accordingly, feeling her face flaming with embarrassment at her nakedness, but forcing herself to concentrate on the pleasure her submission provided to her professor.

‘Good girl,’ he said, and the ache between her legs throbbed as if in answer to him. ‘Was there something you wanted to ask me?’

‘Please, sir,’ she said, raising her face. ‘Reading the book and seeing the drawings has been so arousing—may I come?’

His eyes travelled down to her breasts, lingering upon them with pleasure before he answered her. ‘Next Saturday night, when you come to me with your skirt raised and your cunt bare, do not wear a bra. It is time for you to learn how your breasts can bring pleasure to your Dominant.’

Hermione felt the gooseflesh break out over her body at his words, her nipples hardening to aching pebbles. ‘Yes, sir,’ she said.

He leaned back slightly in his chair, his formal manner melting into the smooth, sure, accepting posture she had come to know and love. ‘Did your cunt get wet when you read Master Maximus’ book?’

‘Yes,’ she whispered, the throbbing intensifying as he referred to her arousal.

‘What kind of girl sits in her professor’s study, reads erotic books, and wants to touch her clt, Hermione?’ he asked, his silky baritone settling over her as if she had been dipped in chocolate fondant.

‘A s-slut, sir,’ she responded, wishing he would touch her, or tell her to touch herself.

He was on his feet then, circling behind her, and he knelt at her back. ‘On all fours for your spanking, little slut,’ he purred, and she scrambled to obey, getting her knees beneath her and presenting her behind to him.

‘That’s my girl,’ he told her, and his cold fingers spread her labia as he tested out the evidence of her want. ‘Oh my, you are a filthy, nasty girl, little slut,’ he said, rolling her clitoris with the tips of his fingers, drawing a keening moan from her throat. ‘I’m afraid you’ll need a rather harsh spanking.’ He drew his fingers slowly, excruciatingly through her slick folds, as if to draw upon her bottom with the juices of her quim. ‘Shall I stop now, Hermione?’

‘No!’ she moaned. ‘Please don’t! Please spank me, sir!’

‘If you insist,’ he replied smugly, and the hand which had lately rolled her clitoris like an olive in oil descended upon her bottom with a resounding smack, drawing a cry of delight from her.

He slapped her arse with his bare hand, kneeling upon the rug behind her, leaning into his work, his
breath becoming short as he spanked. Hermione thrust back into the blows, feeling each like the thrust of a cock in her quim, and when he aimed a few lighter blows to her sopping wet cunt, she quivered with the sensation, the pain and pleasure blending seamlessly for her.

Soon he began to spank harder, raining blows upon her flesh until every strike burned, and she was sobbing limply when he pulled her back into a kneeling position, holding her back securely against his chest, pressing his wool-covered erection firmly into her sore bum as his hands slid down her belly to her quim. Her legs trembled so that she scarcely felt as if she could maintain her balance, but one iron-like arm held her to him, and he expertly fingered her quim, whispering to her, his silky, filthy words warm in her ear as he brought her off.

‘That’s right, little one,’ he purred, holding her pinned to him, rubbing her clitoris in an unrelenting circle with the perfect amount of pressure, the bulge of his still-clothed cock pressed between the cheeks of her bum, ‘filthy little girls like you want to be spanked and fingered until they come—isn’t that right? Yes, I thought so, dirty girl. That’s right—don’t be shy, let me hear you. Tell me it’s good—tell me you want it—you need it—that’s good; good girl—now … come for me!’

And she did, hard and long, feeling the sensation shudder through her muscles until she thought she would liquefy into spasms. At the last moment, he cupped her mound in the palm of his large, warm hand, murmuring soothing nonsense words until the quivering passed. Then he was stretched out upon the rug in his black teaching suit, with her naked body held comfortably against him. He cast a non-verbal Cushioning Charm beneath their prone bodies and Summoned the green blanket, wrapping her against the chill of the November day.

They lay together that way as the shimmering of the underwater window darkened to tourmaline green, the autumn afternoon passing into twilight, and Hermione dozed in his arms, safe and at peace.
Chapter 14 - Remarkable

Today, you will wear no knickers beneath your skirt. In Potions, you will sit at the table nearest the stone basin. When I approach, you will lift your skirt and show me your cunt. If you also touch yourself in my classroom while my eyes are upon you, then you may come today.

Hermione stared at the spiky writing in her green leather journal—writing which had not been present when she had gone to sleep the night before—with her mouth agape. He wanted her to go about all day with no knickers? And to pull up her skirt in class? And to touch herself?

Was he insane?

No, he’s a Dominant, and he’s pushing your boundaries, the voice of reason informed her.

Well, it wouldn’t kill her to go without knickers for a day, even if it was bloody draughty in the castle—and if she was working at a table alone, it wouldn’t be too hard to flash her professor—and touching herself in class would be …

Forcing her mind away from that titillating prospect, she locked her journal away and hurried to dress for breakfast. Thinking about it would just make her want to come, and he had not permitted her to do so since Sunday. Nearly three days without an orgasm, when lately, she had been masturbating every single day, sometimes more than once. It had been very difficult for her.

It did, indeed, feel as if every random draught of air in the castle found its way up her skirt during the day, but by the time she arrived in the dungeons for Potions class, she was far too excited to notice the cold. She followed the boys to their usual table and began to unpack her things, then just before her professor called the class to order, she snatched up her bag and whipped down the row to the very last table, muttering something to the boys before she left about needing to rinse her cauldron in the gargoyle basin.

Professor Snape waved his hand to place the instructions for the brewing of the Skele-Gro Potion on the chalkboard, then returned to his desk without glancing Hermione’s way. She methodically set out her ingredients and began to prepare them. When she had everything set up the way she preferred, she began to combine the ingredients in her cauldron, setting a low fire beneath it and slowing increasing the heat as she brewed. She had been at work for nearly thirty minutes, completely involved in her project, when she saw the sweep of her professor’s black cloak from the corner of her eye.

Shit! She had been concentrating so hard on doing the potion properly, she had forgotten her other class-time project!

Leaving the glass stirring rod to sit in the thickening liquid, she snatched her skirt up, feeling the icy air of the dungeon pebbling the flesh on her thighs and hips with gooseflesh. He was behind her now; he could not possibly see her bare cunt. Nevertheless she tucked the hem of her skirt in her waistband and began to stir her potion again, loath to ruin the entire batch over a bit of play with her professor.

She was aware of him when he stopped at her side, ostensibly to view the contents of her cauldron, and she darted a glance first at him, then at the rest of the class. His gaze was upon her uncovered nether regions; the attention of her classmates was focussed upon their own cauldrons—no one was aware of Hermione and her professor.
Abandoning the potion a second time, she moved both hands below the edge of the table, spreading the top of her labia with the fingers of her left hand while seeking out her clitoris with her right index finger. Tilting her face slightly towards him, she dared to meet Professor Snape’s eyes as she touched herself for the first time in three days. Her mouth gaped slightly as she breathed out unsteadily, stifling the whimper which rose in her throat. She saw his black eyes dart from her quim to her face and back again. Now she plucked at her clitoris, wrenching a gasp from herself; she saw his eyes widen slightly. Her tongue slid from her mouth, moistening her parted lips, and something in him seemed to break.

Lunging past her, he grabbed the container of black beetle eyes from her Potions kit and dashed it to the floor; the ceramic shattered and beetle eyes flew in every direction. Heads turned in alarm, and Hermione dropped her skirt, staring at her professor in amazement.

‘This sort of carelessness will not be tolerated in my classroom!’ he informed her icily. With a wave of his wand, he cleared her congealing potion from her cauldron. ‘You may spend the rest of the class period restocking the supply cupboard!’

Hermione did not answer him; she was too confused about what had just happened. With her head high, she swept past him to the storeroom and went in, leaving the door ajar. She stood in the enclosed space, staring at the open crate of salamander scales and wondering if she should begin to fill the large, empty glass jar on the shelf above it.

Then he was through the door, casting an Imperturbable Charm upon it before snapping it closed behind him, plunging them into darkness. Hermione was completely disoriented, but her professor seemed to know exactly where he was, backing her up against the shelving, enveloping her in his odours of aftershave and coffee.

His hands found their way surely up her skirt, and before either of them spoke, he had two long fingers inside of her, pumping in and out, even as his knowing thumb danced lightly over her clitoris.

‘Do you have any idea,’ he hissed into her ear, sounding oddly breathless, as if he’d been running a long distance, ‘what happens to a little slut who flashes her cunt at me in my classroom?’

‘N-no,’ she gasped, bunching her fists in his robes and grinding against his hand.

‘She gets her quim fingered in the dark,’ he whispered, suiting action to words as he pumped his fingers in and out of her. ‘She gets the teacher’s hand up her skirt, and he touches her and says filthy things to her until she comes all over his fingers—because he knows what a nasty, needy little slut she is, and how she needs his fingers in her cunt all the time—don’t you, Hermione?’

She writhed on his hand, the dark and the outrageous nature of the encounter ridding her of all inhibition. His lips were at her ear, and she wanted so desperately to have his lips on hers, to have his tongue fuck her mouth the way his fingers fucked her cunt—but he knocked the notion right out of her mind by commanding, in a perfectly normal tone of voice, ‘Come now, Hermione,’ and closing his teeth upon the lobe of her ear.

The little jolt of pleasurable pain sent her careening over the edge, the pent-up need shuddering violently through her as she climaxed, gasping and keening. Then she sagged against him, and he wrapped her up in his arms.

In the unknowing dark, Hermione dared to run one hand lightly down the buttons of his coat and more lightly still down the stabbing length of his rock-hard erection. He growled but did not object as she dared to grasp it through his trousers, and he thrust against her hand with a groan before prying her fingers loose and clasping her hand against his chest. She found their joined hands by
nuzzling across his chest, and her lips pressed to the hand which still smelled of her slick quim.

It was the first time she had ever dared to kiss him.

‘I’m very pleased,’ he said, pulling her a bit away from the shelf and running a hand soothingly down her back. ‘You followed directions and even accepted the challenge of touching yourself in class.’ He squeezed the hand he held. ‘Any Dominant would be proud of you—you’re a remarkable woman, Hermione.’

The oil lamp overhead flared to life as he released her, stepping away. Wishing desperately to remain in his arms, Hermione turned away from him, suddenly embarrassed to be in the light with him after what they had just done. ‘I’m not remarkable,’ she objected, turning away from him to straighten her skirt and blouse. ‘I’m not even pretty.’

He did not respond to her words, but he moved away from her, and she heard the door handle turn. ‘What am I supposed to do?’ she cried, turning to him.

He sneered at her, but the tone of his voice told her that he was teasing. ‘You will take the rest of the class period to restock the shelves, Miss Granger,’ he said, before disappearing through the door in a swirl of black robes.

_You have my permission to relive our time in the storage room as you use one of your toys to bring yourself off_, the journal told her after dinner. _Then you will write one thousand words in your journal regarding the definition of the word “remarkable.”_

Hermione smirked to herself as she scrambled to retrieve Number Fourteen from its place of honour in her box of toys. Only Professor Snape could give delight by permitting her to relive their classroom encounter while fucking herself with her favourite toy, then take it away by giving her extra homework.

Still and all, she was not complaining.
Chapter 15 - The Penny Drops

By Saturday night, she felt like a Weasley Wildfire Whiz-bang looking for a place to explode. Professor Snape had denied her requests to come for the rest of the week, so when she entered his study with her quim bare, she felt as tightly-strung as a Stradivarius.

He sat at the table, quill in hand, writing in his journal … their journal. What did he write when he wasn’t writing instructions for her to follow? Did he write of his own masturbatory adventures? Did he write of her?

Don’t be an idiot, her inner voice advised.

Rather than leaving her waiting for an extended period of time, as he had done more than once, he rose directly from the table and approached her.

‘Good evening, Hermione,’ he said, his glittering eyes sweeping over her in a way that set her heart to racing. He was behaving differently yet again. Why did things seem to be constantly changing between them?

‘Hello, sir,’ she responded softly.

He wore the form-fitting, white high-necked jumper over slim black trousers; his clean hair was brushed straight back from his forehead, a blue-black sheen which fell to his shoulders. She reflected, not for the first time, that this angular man had become the one male on the planet whom she desired.

After studying her for a while, he said, ‘Did you enjoy assuming the submissive’s pose for me last week?’

Bright hope flared in her heart. Was there something he actually wanted from her? ‘Yes, I did, sir,’ she answered.

‘Then you may do so again,’ he said.

It was much easier this time than it had been the week before; she wore a skirt with no knickers. In no time she had shed every stitch of clothing, and she knelt, carefully spreading her knees as he had instructed her before.

In some ways, it was very hard for Hermione to be still and quiet as she waited for him to decide to act, but in other ways, it was terribly easy. There were no decisions for her make about what to say or what to do. Her one decision was to yield to him, and he took the onus from there.

She saw his booted feet begin to move toward her, and then he paced a circle around her, as if surveying her for a physical flaw. She shied away from that thought. She was naked, and men liked nudity; she was submissive, and Dominants liked submission. With what was there for him to find fault?

‘Hermione, I would like for you to stand,’ he said, and she obeyed him, scrambling to her feet, aware of his presence behind her. ‘I am going to look at your body,’ he told her, as if he had been doing something other than that for the last several minutes. ‘Would you be more comfortable with the
blindfold?"

‘Yes, please!’ she blurted before even thinking.

She heard his chuckle and closed her eyes, then felt the silk cover them. ‘Is that comfortable?’ he asked, the minty toothpaste smell of his breath fanning over her cheek, sending a chill through her nerve-endings, covering her in gooseflesh and peaking her nipples to aching pebbles.

‘Yes, sir,’ she breathed, daring to lean lightly into his hard, supple frame.

Then he moved away from her, and she was standing naked in the chilly room. Every now and again she heard a sound—a rustle of fabric, an indrawn breath to the side—but he did not speak, and time ticked by.

When it became difficult for her to remain standing without shifting her position, she was aware of movement around her, though she could not distinguish what it was, and the air in the room changed—became closer, somehow, and warmer. He was directly at her back again, his hands resting lightly upon her shoulders.

‘You can move,’ he murmured, and she thankfully shifted her position. When she stilled, he said, ‘Hermione, do you trust me?’

She felt a thrill of danger. Why would he ask such a thing now? ‘I trust you, sir,’ she replied.

Her hair pulled a bit, then the blindfold was gone.

‘Open your eyes, little one,’ he said quietly, and she did.

She was standing before a large mirror, which reflected not only her frontal nudity but her naked arse from a mirror behind, as well. She turned her head right and left, encountering identical mirrors, and she realised he had ringed her in with them. Here she was, completely naked and standing in a circle of looking glasses.

‘You argued with me when I said you were remarkable,’ he told her, and her eyes were drawn to his in the mirror. He stood more than a head taller than she was, his hands still resting upon her shoulders as if to hold her to earth. ‘Your answer, which was entirely unrelated to my observation, alerted me to something that we must work on, Hermione—you body image.’

She felt her face flush with embarrassment, and she averted her eyes. She had suffered with her lack of prettiness for eighteen years, and having this discussion with the man she wanted was not a choice she would have made …

She sighed deeply. That was completely the point, wasn’t it? She wasn’t making the decisions here—he was—and if he thought they should have this discussion, then it was going to happen, whether she liked it or not.

One of his hands touched her chin, lifting her face up, their eyes locking again in the reflective surface. ‘A submissive woman should be fully aware of her body, little one—she should know how it works and how to use it to bring pleasure to her Dominant and to herself. Do you understand?’

She nodded once to the reflection of his face, and a rare smile touched his lips.
‘Good girl,’ he murmured. His hands smoothed from her shoulders to her wrists, soothing and warming her. ‘You’re going to hear rather more compliments from me tonight than you are accustomed to,’ he warned her. ‘I want you to listen to me very carefully, for all of the information I give will be true—I do not pay false compliments—and it is highly unlikely that I will ever repeat myself. Do you understand me?’

‘Yes, Professor,’ she said, leaning against him for comfort, and he permitted it.

‘You worry that you are not pretty,’ he said, stroking fingertips down her cheek. ‘First of all, I would like to point out that the standards of “pretty” change from generation to generation and from culture to culture.’

She heard disdain in his voice, but oddly enough, she did not believe for one moment that the disdain was meant for her. She recognised that this unconventional-looking man had lived his whole life under the stigma of unattractive, which would be enough to sour anyone on the societal notions of good looks.

‘Furthermore, it is important to remember that prettiness begins to fade long before our bodies grow old, and a healthy body is always capable of providing us with pleasure.’ The hand which had stroked her face now caressed her throat, drawing a purr from her, which made him smile. ‘You have large brown eyes, a perfectly acceptable nose, and a well-shaped mouth. Your skin is clear, and your hair is rather wild. I understand that females find this to be a trial, but my opinion is that your hair does not detract from your overall appeal.’

He was truly studying her in the mirror, his attention transferring from feature to feature as he spoke of her, and Hermione found herself listening to his frank evaluation with interest. It was a bit like looking at herself through someone else’s eyes, and she felt that she was seeing herself differently.

‘As a man, I am quite interested in the rest of you,’ he murmured into her ear, and Hermione felt a wash of desire warm her to the tips of her toes. ‘You have a heart-shaped bottom, perfect for spanking.’ He stepped away from her. ‘Watch, and you’ll see what I mean.’

His hand landed on her bum, and she could see the interaction from every direction. His palm impacted her flesh, which quivered with the blow, sending waves of pleasure straight to her quim. He smacked her again, then again before saying, ‘Don’t just watch my hand on your arse, little one—watch your face when I strike you.’

Oh, he was right. Her eyes were unfocussed, her lips parted as she took panting breaths. Clearly, spanking changed her.

He observed her as she looked at herself in the mirror. ‘Have you ever seen anything more lovely,’ he murmured, ‘than a naughty little submissive getting the spanking she so badly needs?’

Entranced, she murmured, ‘Lovely,’ and waited to see what he would do next.

He crouched and drew his hands from her bum cheeks down the backs of her legs to her heels. ‘Your legs are very good, Hermione, nicely shaped.’ He nuzzled at the apex of her thighs, and she held her breath, hoping he would lick her quim. ‘Your wet cunt smells divine,’ he said, and the heat of his breath made her want to push herself into his face. He leaned around her hip and smirked at her in the mirror. ‘But that’s about aroma, not about appearance,’ he said, standing up.

Gently, he turned her to face him. ‘I want to talk to you about your breasts,’ he said, now looking
down into her eyes, and suddenly, it was different. It was no longer like a classroom lecture on self-respect—it had become a man looking into a woman’s eyes and conveying very personal admiration. ‘Ever since you assumed the submissive’s pose for me last week, I have been thinking about your breasts,’ he admitted, the heat in his gaze igniting her smouldering desire like leaping brushfire. ‘I am, as the saying goes, a “breast man”, and I am here to tell you that yours are exceptional.’

And he reached out and touched her breasts for the first time, his warm palms cupping them, his attention focussed on the twin globes.

‘Yours are neither too small, which gives the appearance of boyishness, nor too large, which can create a dissonance of overall disproportion. They sit upon your chest wall like dollops of cream upon a pudding, with palest pink frosting at the tips.’ His thumbs passed deliberately over her needful nipples, and his heavy-lidded onyx eyes lifted to her face as a gasp of pure desire escaped her lips. ‘In my life I have never seen breasts more lovely than yours, little one, and you should preen yourself on their perfection. Men have committed mayhem for possession of less luscious bodies than yours.’

Hermione stood before him feeling as if only his hands upon her breasts kept her on her feet. His words flowed over and around her with the authority of truth, and the certainty of his assertions filled the empty vessel of her understanding, seeming to transform her body by the power of his proclamation alone. His hands shifted, so that her nipples were pressed to the centres of his palms, and he gently, rhythmically squeezed, massaging her breasts, creating a matching ache between her legs, until the dampness there seeped onto her thighs. She was golden under his touch, her body the agent of his pleasure, and she had never been more sure of anything than she was of this fact: She aroused his deepest animal passions.

And the penny dropped.

He wanted her. He fought the desire, subsumed it to his general Dominance, but in a blinding sweep of visceral awareness, she knew that his attraction to her was very personal, uniquely particular, and slowly slipping the leash of his matchless restraint.

He had handed her a weapon of superlative strength, and she would be a fool not to use it to obtain the prize she most wished to win: This Dominant wizard, for her very own.
Chapter 16 - Twin Gazelles

Hermione stood in the glory of that moment, knowing herself to be desired by the man of her choice, until the sheen of his black hair lowered, and his lips were at her nipple.

‘I’m going to enjoy your breasts now, Hermione—’ his long tongue darted out, its broad, flat surface lapping tantalisingly at her left nipple ‘—do you have any objections?’

Shafts of pleasure darted along her nerve endings. ‘No!’ she gasped helplessly. ‘Please!’

Then his lips closed over her areola, and she gasped, the sensation overloading her heightened sensory pathways. He applied firm suction to her nipple, tugging it insistently into his mouth. His eyes were closed as he concentrated his attention on his task, the fingers of one hand teasing the opposite nipple even as his free hand stroked the curve of her waist, from the swell of her hip up to her ribcage and down again. Hermione’s eyes drifted closed, and her hands rose to run gently through the strands of his hair, seeking not to guide his actions but to indulge in the ability to touch him freely.

His head swivelled, transferring his lips to the other breast, and the hand at her waist rose to pull at the nipple still damp with his saliva. The hand which had been replaced at her nipple by the professor’s wicked lips stroked down her torso to the tangle of dark curls, and knowing fingers dipped within, rolling over her clitoris and wringing a moan from Hermione. He plucked simultaneously at her clitoris and at her nipple, his fingers synchronising to heighten her need, and then his lips were at her ear.

‘What do you want, Hermione?’ he asked, the tip of his tongue tracing the shell of her sensitive ear.

Her eyes opened, seeing their reflections, his taller figure bent over hers, the soft white jumper showing off his fit frame, the black trousers doing little to hide the aggressive tent of his erection. She turned her face to his, her lips encountering the skin of his jaw; he seemed not to notice, the tip of his tongue continuing its assault of her ear. She pressed her lips to his jawline, seeking to turn farther, wishing to bring her lips to his—but his hands imprisoned her face, and he pulled back far enough to look into her eyes.

‘I want you to kiss me,’ she begged, her tongue darting out to moisten her lips.

‘Is that all?’ he asked, one of his large hands sliding down to encompass her throat, while its twin brushed hair tenderly from her brow.

‘And I want you to fuck me,’ she whispered, arching her nakedness against him, twisting slightly to rub her nipples against his clothed chest.

His black eyes bored into hers, his expression grave, and he stroked his long fingers down her throat. With a soft whump, a wide armchair appeared behind him, and he released her, stepping back and seating himself.

‘Straddle me,’ he directed her, and she scrambled to obey him, her knees snuggling easily about his hips, her breasts almost on level with his mouth. His tongue darted out, laving each breast in turn before he allowed his head to fall back upon the high-backed chair. ‘There are few things more erotic than having a woman offer her breasts to me, Hermione,’ he said, his midnight eyes half-lidded. ‘Cup your breasts with your hands and offer them to me—tell me that you give me free rein to do as I will with them.’
Hermione wanted to kiss his lips and suck his tongue into her mouth—she wanted to free him from his trousers and sheathe his erection in her heat—but as ever, his voice compelled her to listen, and listening, she could do naught but obey. Like one in a dream, she lifted her breasts towards him, her voice sounding breathless to her ears as she said, ‘My breasts are yours to enjoy, sir—you may do anything you wish.’

Where before his look had been intent and sultry, now his eyes glittered as he looked at her, balancing over his lap and holding out her breasts as if they were a special treat. She felt an echo of embarrassment, but overall she was more fascinated by his response to her words. As his eyes closed his lashes swept down, inky black upon his pale skin, and with unerring aim his lips found her nipple, closing over it and beginning to suck in earnest. The sensation was so intense that, at first, she was discomfited by it; she knew the impulse to pull away from him, but she was keenly aware of the words he had asked her to speak—she had given him permission to do anything he wanted. She couldn’t deny him now without unpleasantness—it would be better to simply endure, and then she would get what she wanted.

Oh, surely he would let her come, wouldn’t he?

Thus resolved, she was startled when his eyes opened, lifted to observe her face, though his lips did not release her. She was shocked to feel his teeth encompass the nipple held captive in his mouth, and she felt a surge of fear. Would he bite her? Hurt her? No, surely not—she trusted him, didn’t she?

The teeth closed ever so lightly on the flesh around her areola, accompanied by suction and the devilish application of his tongue, and when he turned his face to take the other nipple in his mouth, his hand came up to lightly pinch the nipple he had released, sending a shockwave of pleasure through her body. Dear Merlin, what a sensation! Attention to one nipple provided one set of reactions, but when he worked upon them simultaneously, she could feel it in her quim.

She deliberately thrust herself upon his erection, squirming into as much contact as she could achieve, goaded on by his unrelenting mouth upon her nipples. He made no objection to either her gyrations or her fingers in his hair; he was far too absorbed in his activities. He had moved her hands out of his way and manipulated her breasts for himself, now, lifting them and pressing them together, managing to lick them together with swipes of his wide tongue, and when he pressed hard enough, he could get both nipples in his mouth at once, which made Hermione keen with pleasure. On and on it went, for he seemed not to grow weary of making love to her breasts.

When at last he leaned back, away from her chest, he continued to hold her breasts, very gently and methodically squeezing them, each compression sending a thrill of sensation to her aching, dripping quim.

‘Your nipples will be sore for a few days, I think,’ he said, sounding quite satisfied with this result. ‘Every time you touch them—even accidentally—you’ll think of me.’

Hermione did not to respond; her level of need made her all but inarticulate.

‘You’ll have love bites upon them, as well, so be careful not to undress in the company of anyone else,’ he added thoughtfully, ceasing his compressions to gently pinch her slightly aching nipples. Even though they were sore, it still was pleasurable—he was driving her mad!

‘Please, sir,’ she said, grinding her quim against his erection. ‘Please …’

He leaned forward and pressed a closed-mouth kiss to each of her nipples, and one large, warm hand came down to cup her mound. ‘There, you’ve had your kisses,’ he said, his wry smile showing that
he knew very well those weren’t the kisses she had hoped for. ‘Now, you need your fucking—but I think a spanking is in order first, don’t you?’

Hermione moaned aloud in frustration, near tears with her need to orgasm. How could he touch and arouse her so and be so impervious to his own arousal? She could feel the evidence of his sexual excitement, hard as iron beneath her naked bum. What man wouldn’t want to whip out his cock and fuck the dripping cunt rubbing insistently over the front of his trousers?

Was he made of iron?

‘Accio Hermione’s hairbrush,’ he said, never looking away from her, and the implement zoomed obediently into his hand. ‘On your feet,’ he said to her, gentle but implacable.

With shaking legs, Hermione climbed from his lap.

‘Brace your hands on the arm of the chair,’ he instructed.

Hermione did as she was told, bending over to press her hands against the armchair, smelling the odour of her own arousal and feeling embarrassed about it. This was the longest he had ever engaged her in ongoing activity without doing something to assuage her need, and she felt near the limit of her ability to endure.

‘Spread your legs a bit, little one,’ he murmured, and when she complied, he stroked the back of the hairbrush down the middle of her lower back. ‘Are you ready?’

Hermione gripped the arm of the chair and closed her eyes. ‘Y-yes,’ she sobbed.

‘You don’t have to take the spanking, Hermione,’ he said, bending now so that his body arced over hers. ‘You feel that you have endured quite enough, don’t you?’

Hermione bit her lip, wishing to stop the crying. She was afraid to answer the question; sometimes, questions could be treacherous things when one was dealing with a Dominant.

‘You can dress and go back to your room without the spanking,’ he told her quietly. ‘There will be no negative repercussions; you will be permitted to return next Saturday. Or, you can take the spanking, and I will make sure you orgasm.’ One large hand rested for a moment upon her naked back. ‘What will it be?’

Weary as she was, Hermione wasn’t even tempted by the offer. She had to come or she would die, she as sure of it. ‘The s-spanking,’ she managed, determined to persevere.

‘Good girl,’ he murmured, and in the next instant, the back of her special hairbrush impacted her bottom, not one iota of his strength held back in spite of her fragility.

Hermione found herself leaning back into the blows, steadied by the reassuring familiarity of her professor’s undivided attention, feeling her breasts sway with each slap of the brush upon her flesh. She began to cry in earnest, all the emotions of the session—of hearing him praise her body and of realising that he desired her as much as she desired him—resolving in her mind and flowing out with her tears, freeing her of their burden. When he delivered the last spank to her bottom and put the hairbrush aside, lifting her into his arms, she was once again a vessel empty of negative thoughts and emotions, prepared to receive what her Dominant —Master, a perfidious voice in her mind corrected—had determined she needed.

She buried her face against his soft white jumper, feeling her tears leaving a wet spot and not caring. He murmured an incantation and the mirrors were gone; he carried her to the cobalt blue sofa and
seated himself with her held securely in his lap.

‘Such a good girl,’ he murmured into her hair. ‘You have earned a reward, little one.’

Hermione lifted her tear-stained face and looked at him, his lank black hair hanging on either side of his narrow face, his black eyes deep enough that she might drown there. His hooked nose dominated a face marked by planes and sharp angles, and she knew she had never seen a man she found more attractive than this one.

He stroked hair out of her face and spoke in that silky tone which turned her insides to liquid. ‘You may have your orgasm by having me eat out your dripping wet little cunt until you can’t come any more—or I can kiss your mouth and finger fuck you.’

Hermione gasped and reached for him, twining her arms behind his neck. ‘Please kiss me,’ she said, lifting her face and closing her eyes.

He nuzzled her throat as his fingers sought out her clitoris. ‘Tell me whom you’ve kissed before and I shall,’ he promised.

Hermione didn’t even consider arguing with him. ‘Viktor Krum,’ she said, raising her hips to meet his fingers. ‘Ron Weasley.’

Two fingers slid up into her body, beginning a slow in-and-out. ‘Anyone else?’ he murmured, his teeth scraping gently over her jaw.

Hermione groaned, splaying her legs farther apart and thrusting against his hand. ‘No!’ she gasped.

And the thin cruel lips she knew so well captured hers, and the tongue which had been in the most intimate crevices of her body invaded her mouth, stroking in surely, enticing her with his mouth as surely as he did with his fingers. Hermione clung to him, sucking greedily as he bucked against the hand in her quim, teasing the tip of his tongue with her own. He growled into her mouth, his thumb circling her clitoris as his tongue parried hers, and she clung to him with her arms, allowing him to possess and pillage her body. He lightly nibbled on her lip as his thumb and forefinger plucked at her clitoris, then he sucked her tongue into his mouth, suckling it as he had done with her nipples, his fingers fucking her into mindlessness. When the earthquake of her climax came upon her, she shivered, shook, and quaked in his arms until he wrapped her in a blanket and stilled her with the warmth of his body and the incessant murmuring of comforting nothings in her ear.

When she had come back to herself, he allowed her to curl against him, swathed in the green blanket she thought of as ‘hers’, and to read from Master Maximus’ book. He held a leather-bound volume in his lap and read it desultorily, but she was aware that he spent quite a bit of time watching her. Hermione smiled to herself, pleased with the knowledge she had gained tonight and beginning to imagine how she might put it to use.

At ten o’clock, a tea service appeared on a low table near the sofa. They sat companionably drinking their tea until he said, ‘You made tremendous progress in your submission tonight, Hermione.’

She turned her gaze to his face. ‘Did I?’ she asked, thinking of how she had come to know that his desire for her ran rather deeper than he wanted her to realise.

‘Yes,’ he responded seriously. ‘You thought you had reached the end of your endurance, but you trusted me—and you found that you yet had more to give me, didn’t you?’
She flushed with pleasure at his words of praise, feeling suddenly shy. How was it that she could spread her quim for this man without a qualm but verbal praise from him completely disarmed her, making her feel like a girl on her first date?

‘Yes, I did,’ she admitted. ‘How did you know I could take more?’ She hoped he wouldn’t find the question impertinent; she truly wanted to know the answer.

He smiled his rare smile. ‘It’s my job to know your limits, Hermione—and to push them.’ He looked serious again. ‘It pleases me very much when you trust my judgement and reach within yourself to discover your stores of endurance. How did it feel?’

Hermione took a swallow of her tea. ‘It felt …’ she searched for the proper word ‘… purifying, and then it was transcendent. I was outside of myself.’ She dared to look into his eyes. ‘How did it feel to you?’

He set his teacup on the tray and took her empty cup from her, as well. ‘Much the same,’ he said evenly.

‘Why didn’t you want to climax, too?’ she asked.

‘It is not your concern,’ he pointed out, still gentle, but with a hint of iron in his tone.

‘But I want to please you, sir,’ she persisted.

Half a smile touched his lips. ‘Of course you do, Hermione,’ he said. ‘I am your Dominant. It is the nature of the submissive to long to please her Dominant.’ He stood and held his hand out to her; obediently, she stood as well, allowing the blanket to fall to her feet. Distracted, his eyes roved down her nakedness. ‘You will make a very fine submissive for a very lucky master one day,’ he said, his voice sounding oddly strained.

Filled with an abrupt renewal of desire, she stepped up to him and wrapped her arms about him, looking up into his suddenly wary eyes.

‘There’s still time,’ she said coaxingly, rubbing her breasts provocatively against his jumper.

He stepped away from her. ‘No, there is not,’ he said firmly.

Trying to ignore the onset of separation anxiety, Hermione lifted her arms to him again. ‘May I not kiss you good night?’ she asked softly.

‘No, you may not.’ He nodded towards her discarded clothing. ‘Please honour our agreement, Hermione.’

Sighing deeply, she turned away and began to dress, fighting her inclination to cry. Why did it have to be so hard to leave him every time?

Then he was beside her, a small phial in his hand. ‘Use this ointment on your breasts for the soreness and bruising,’ he instructed.

Hermione tucked the phial away with murmured thanks and hastened to the doorway.

His voice halted her with her hand upon the door. ‘You may orgasm tomorrow, Hermione, in any way you wish; afterwards, you will write two thousand words in your journal about your method, your fantasy, and your results.’
Hermione looked over her shoulder and smiled at him, already knowing what she would fantasise about. ‘Yes, sir,’ she said and exited, leaving him standing alone in the middle of the room, tall and slender, backlit by the roaring fire.
Chapter 17 - Fantasy to Reality

Author's notes: “The book” Hermione is thinking of in this chapter is *The Sensual Symmetry of Submission*, the book written by Master Maximus and his submissive, t, which Professor Snape is allowing Hermione to read in his study to educate her about Dominance and submission, otherwise known as D/s.

Excerpt from the journal of Miss Hermione Granger:

**Sunday, 23 November**

*Thank you for permitting me to come today, sir. As instructed, this is my report, including my method, my fantasy, and my results.*

*(And you were right, of course; every time the fabric of my jumper brushed over my nipples today, I thought of you and how you used me last night.)*

Hermione smirked to herself. In *The Sensual Symmetry of Submission*, the submissive, t, referred to her Master’s ‘use’ of her body for his pleasure. Of course, t usually got quite a bit of pleasure from it, too—but in t’s mind, the purpose of their encounters was the pleasure of her master. Hermione hoped Professor Snape would note and approve her proper usage of the word.

*I used my favourite toy, Number Fourteen. After bathing and applying the ointment you provided, I stretched out naked on my bed, pulled the curtains closed, and began imagining my fantasy.*

*I was wearing your collar, plain, black leather, with a silver disk bearing your initials as its only ornament.*

Hermione had learned from her reading that a submissive was ‘collared’ by her master as a sign of ownership. When a submissive was collared by a Dominant, she was his submissive. Some Dominants had more than one submissive, but once a submissive was collared, she had only one Dominant. In the case of t and Master Maximus, she had become his collared submissive some time before she had become his wife. Their relationship had grown from a D/s arrangement to a romance to a marriage. According to the book, it was a fairly rare progression of events in the wizarding D/s world—most of the people involved in wizarding D/s were married to other people before they became aware of their proclivities, and divorce was less common among wizards than among Muggles—but t had been just out of school when a friend had invited her to a party where she had met Master Maximus.

Hermione enjoyed that part of the book so well that she had read through it more than once. The gathering at which t had met her master had been a ‘vanilla’ cocktail party. ‘Vanilla’ was the term D/s participants used to refer to anything unrelated to D/s. Master Maximus was older than t by several years, but she had been so strongly drawn to him that she spent her time at the party trying to chat him up, ignoring the overtures of the young wizards closer to her age. Master Maximus had been first annoyed, then amused, then intrigued by the persistent young witch. Nevertheless, when he had left the cocktail party that night, he had put her from his mind.
The young witch in question, however, had been quite determined. The mutual friend who had hosted the cocktail party had been persuaded, over time, to divulge to t what he knew about Master Maximus’ hobbies and pursuits. When t had turned up next at a D/s dungeon party for wizards and witches new to the lifestyle, Master Maximus had been forced to deal with her … and in so doing, had begun the relationship which had evolved into a marriage.

Hermione shook herself from her reverie—how she loved to imagine what a wizarding dungeon party would be like! —to apply herself to writing a report so entrancing that her professor would be able to think of little else for the rest of the night.

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Clad in only my collar, I was tied spread-eagle to your bed. My wrists and ankles were encased in black leather cuffs and bound to the four posts of your bedstead by blood-red ties. I was nervous but excited enough to be slick between my legs. After what seemed a very long time you entered the room. You were totally naked and completely erect. I wanted you so badly I couldn’t tear my eyes away from you. You stopped at the side of the bed, near my head, and looked down at my body; as you looked, you closed your fist around your cock and you stroked yourself. I licked my lips, watching your hand, then glanced at your face, and you had a rather frightening sneer on your lips.

‘What do you want, Hermione?’ you said, rubbing the pad of your thumb over the head of your cock.

‘Please!’ I gasped. ‘Please fuck me!’

You didn’t speak again, but climbed upon the mattress. I was confused for a moment, expecting you to lie down on top of me, but you surprised me. You placed your knees on either side of my head.

‘Open that pretty mouth,’ you said to me, and when I did, you guided your cock inside.

I closed my lips over it, sucking gently and sweeping my tongue over the head, tasting for the first time the salty flavour of your arousal. I worried that I would gag, but you did not thrust deeply, keeping your movement shallow. I longed to have my hands free, to caress your naked belly and arse and legs. It was heaven to hear the sounds of pleasure you made as you teased my mouth with your cock.

Then you pulled out of my mouth and moved down my body; I was sorry to be deprived of your cock, but I had not long to wait. You knelt between my legs and pushed two fingers inside of me, then three. As you pumped your fingers in and out of my cunt, you pumped your fist on your cock. Then, without a word, you pushed your cock inside of me, filling me, stretching me, and I cried out at the sheer joy of finally having you in my body. You moved over me, licking my breasts and tonguing inside my mouth, tasting your own flavour on my tongue before bracing yourself on your arms and beginning to fuck me in earnest. You started slowly, twisting your arse and moving at different angles, then speeding up, your hips snapping hard and fast into my cunt. I was loud, too loud, crying out and vocalising every sensation; you were silent, staring down into my face, your black hair hanging down, your eyes watching me as you fucked me. Then I came, unable to hold off and make it last longer, and your climax came right after mine, your face contorting in pleasure and your breath coming out in a great gasp as I felt the hot spurt of your semen inside of me.

In that moment my restraints were released, and I wrapped my arms and my legs around you, holding you deep inside of me. You allowed yourself to sag onto me, and I kissed your shoulder and your neck, thanking you for giving me your cock and your come. You moved to the side, and I turned to kiss your mouth. ‘Thank you, Master,’ I said.
I orgasmed twice during this fantasy, sir. It was very satisfactory. Thank you for permitting it.

Hermione laid down her quill and resisted the urge to finger her quim, which was hot and wet. Writing the fantasy had aroused her all over again. But would he find it arousing? She didn’t see how he could not, but then he often surprised her with his reactions to things. Still, she closed her journal and placed it in her drawer, wondering how long it would be before he took his journal down from its shelf to read what she had written. At any rate, he could be in no doubt that she actively fantasised about being his collared submissive—that she wanted him for her master. Surely he would at least be flattered by her regard, wouldn’t he?

She had read in the book that Master Maximus had done all he could to discourage t from joining the D/s community, refusing to mentor her, in the beginning. He had publicly humiliated her and rejected her. Later, when gossip had surfaced of another Dominant in the community being unkind to t, Master Maximus had investigated the allegations, duelled the other wizard, and had him expelled from D/s wizarding society in Britain. Then he had taken t into his home and looked after her. In time, she had offered her submission to him.

Hermione rose from her desk and wandered to the window, looking out into the ghostly autumn night. It was early still, only nine o’clock on a Sunday night. What if she were to throw on her robes and go down to Professor Snape’s study? Perhaps she could recount the fantasy to him in person—how could he fail to be aroused by hearing such filthy talk from her?

She sat in the window embrasure, staring out at the moonlit grounds, idly twirling a lock of bushy hair and daydreaming about those things which occupied her heart and mind. As she sat wool-gathering, she saw the massive form of Hagrid walking toward the boar-topped gates with Fang bounding along at his side. He must be going into Hogsmeade for a pint to top off his weekend, she thought.

Then another figure emerged from the deep shadows at the edge of the castle, moving into the moonlight as it glided gracefully along the path Hagrid had taken. She did not need to see how the cloak billowed about the tall, lean figure to know who else was going into Hogsmeade for a bit of totty to top off his weekend.

Feeling as if she had been punched in the stomach, Hermione turned from the window, and snatching her journal from the bedside table drawer, she ripped out the freshly written pages and hurled them into the fire.

Then she threw herself upon her bed and cried, wishing desperately that she cared as little about Severus Snape as he cared about her.

At last, she slept.
Hermione skipped breakfast the next morning and went early to lunch, bolting her food and running off to the library before the boys had properly served their plates. She couldn’t bear seeing her professor sitting coolly at the head table, ignoring her and eating his meals as if nothing of import had occurred—as if he was not systematically tearing Hermione’s heart to pieces.

Walking down the chilly dungeon corridor to Potions that afternoon with Harry and Ron, Hermione kept up a constant internal monologue. ‘I won’t look at him. I won’t look at him. I won’t look at him. I won’t look at him.’

As soon as she walked through the door, however, her eyes flew to the front of the room—and there she saw the Headmaster, smiling benignly from behind Professor Snape’s desk. She froze.

‘Oi, Hermione!’ Ron complained as he bumped into her. ‘You’re holding it up, here.’

Harry gently pushed her from behind until she was fully in the room, then guided her to their usual table. ‘Are you all right?’ he muttered, watching her face.

Hermione mechanically began to set up her cauldron between her friends, her mind not at all upon what she was doing. ‘Fine,’ she answered tersely, darting fearful glances toward Professor Dumbledore.

Where was he?

‘Good afternoon,’ the Headmaster said cheerfully as the class came to order. ‘I will be teaching your Potions lesson today, as Professor Snape is a bit under the weather.’

Ron snorted softly. ‘It must be our lucky day,’ he muttered.

Hermione began to jerkily chop her daisy roots for the potion written on the chalkboard. ‘Must you be such a child?’ she hissed, her mind awhirl with disordered thoughts.

Was he really ill? Or had he not returned from his tryst with Taffy-the-shop-girl after all?

Harry started preparing his ingredients. ‘Anything that gives me one Snape-free day is all right with me,’ he said flatly.

‘Professor Snape,’ Hermione snapped at him, throwing one scoop of pickled eel bladder into her cauldron.

‘Someone’s hormonal,’ Ron muttered darkly, but Hermione ignored him.

The boys murmured to one another over her head as she mechanically prepared the Toenail Fungus Remover. Had her professor read her entry in the journal before he slipped away for the meeting with his lover? Or had he returned in the night after fucking Taffy to find the pages torn from his book? Would he be too ill to see her if she went to his office after dinner?

‘… has something to do with You-Know-Who?’

Hermione’s head jerked up, and she carelessly sliced the tip of her finger with her silver dagger. ‘What do you mean?’ she gasped.
Harry grabbed her hand. ‘Be careful!’ he said, marching her to the stone basin and pumping water from the gargoyle head to cleanse her fingertip.

‘What were you and Ron talking about?’ she demanded.

Harry did not answer her, but held his wand carefully over her finger to cast a Healing Charm on her cut. She watched him as he concentrated on her injury.

‘We were talking about Order business,’ Ron said softly from behind her. She glanced over her shoulder at him, knowing she should feel grateful for the care he and Harry demonstrated for her, but she was so agitated about the absence of her professor that she could think of little else.

‘Is everything all right back here?’ Professor Dumbledore asked.

The three turned to face him.

‘I was healing Hermione’s finger, sir,’ Harry informed him. ‘She cut herself with her dagger.’

Dumbledore took Hermione’s hand and studied the injured finger over the tops of his half-moon spectacles. ‘Good job, Harry,’ he said cheerfully.

‘Sir,’ Harry said in an urgent whisper, ‘does Snape’s absence have something to do with Order business?’

‘Professor Snape,’ the Headmaster corrected automatically. Then he glanced around at all their faces and leaned closer to them. ‘He was called away last night and has not yet returned.’

Harry questioned the Headmaster more closely, but Hermione was not listening to their words. Called away? Not off to indulge in shagging the shop girl, but summoned by Lord Voldemort? She felt suddenly light-headed, and there was a plunging sensation in her mid-section. She had been jealous, thinking her professor had gone off to meet with his Hogsmeade honey, when in reality he had taken himself into danger on behalf of the Order.

She was so ashamed she could barely draw breath.

Blindly, she followed Harry back to their table and cleared away her things; class was over and she was free for the day. Where could she go? What could she do to atone for her faithlessness?

‘I’m tired of waiting,’ Harry said, and Ron echoed, ‘So am I.’

Hermione looked between them, suddenly back in the present. ‘Waiting for what?’ she said.

‘Waiting to fight Voldemort,’ Harry said. ‘I’m ready to fight him—I’ve trained long enough.’ He took a deep breath. ‘I think it’s time to go find him.’

Ron darted an anxious look to where the Headmaster was entering information in the Potions classroom attendance book. ‘Dumbledore says if we wait just a bit longer …’

Harry slung his bag over his shoulder and moved past them towards the door. ‘I don’t expect anyone to go with me,’ he muttered.

Hermione hurried after him, a new anxiety layering over his concerns for her professor. ‘Harry, I think we have to trust the Headmaster,’ she said, pulling abreast of him in the deserted dungeon corridor. ‘One mistake with You-Know-Who could ruin everything. You’re too valuable to be careless with your safety!’
Harry did not argue with her, but glared defiantly ahead as he strode along. Ron, on the other hand, touched Hermione’s shoulder and gave her a half-smile of thanks. It became more difficult all the time for them to rein in Harry’s impatience to face his parents’ murderer in battle.

Hermione went early to dinner and remained at the table until the head table was deserted, but Professor Snape did not show up. Disconsolately stuffing her book into the pocket of her cloak, she debated what she ought to do. How could she find him—how could she help him?

What would he want me to do? she wondered as she made her way back to Gryffindor Tower. What would Master Maximus want to do in this situation? She smiled to herself as she gave the password to the Fat Lady and passed through the Gryffindor common room. How ludicrous, to imagine Master Maximus and his submissive in the middle of the war with Voldemort. Their community of Dominants and submissives was far removed from the world in which Hermione existed, where she and everyone she cared about lived in daily expectation of war—indeed, lived in daily dread of death and devastation.

Closing the door of her dormitory behind her, she shed her cloak and moved to lift her journal from its drawer. Why had she ripped out the pages telling her professor of her fantasy about him? How could she have been so faithless? She ran a hand lovingly over the green leather binding. Oh, how she wished she was in his presence now, kneeling at his feet in the submissive’s pose, eagerly anticipating his next command. There was nothing she would not do to atone for her doubt.

She hugged the journal to her breasts and bit her lip. How would she know when her professor was safely returned from his mission to the enemy camp? Did she dare to visit his study without permission to seek him out?

…but what if he doesn’t come back? the treacherous voice in her mind inquired. Hadn’t the Headmaster seemed a bit surprised—perhaps even a bit worried—that Professor Snape had yet to return from his summons? What if her professor had been found out—had been summarily executed—what if she were never to see him again?

Hermione bent over, the arms that held her journal to her now holding her tummy as well, her stomach roiling with anxiety. She didn’t know how she would go on if something happened to her Dominant when she had not even had the opportunity to tell him what she felt for him—how she lo—No! She wouldn’t think that word, wouldn’t think of the things she wished she had said to him the last time she had seen him. It had been only two days before, and already it seemed like an aeon since she had been in the soothing—and simultaneously electrifying—presence of her Dominant.

A sob wrenched from her throat, and she threw herself down on her bed, her journal still clutched in her hands. She opened the cover and began to read her earlier entries, imagining him as he read them. She flipped through the pages, looking for the entries where he had written to her, the tip of the finger Harry had healed tracing over the spiky handwriting with near reverence. She turned the page then, and her face filled with shame to see the ragged edges of the pages she had ripped from the binding.

Faithless! she taunted herself, putting the book aside and staring at the canopy of her bed until she fell asleep.

When she awoke, the moon was high in the sky. Hermione struggled to sit up, wondering how late it was. Her candle had guttered out, so she lifted her wand and murmured Lumos to check her watch. It was just after ten o’clock; she had slept for over two hours. She stood to undress, thinking it would be best to pass the rest of the night beneath the bedclothes. She saw her abandoned journal
and picked it up to put it away … but there was new writing on the page after those she had torn from the book.

_Come to study_, the unsteady looking spiky handwriting instructed her. _Rules suspended. Portrait for access. Give name and gift._

Her eyes darted frantically to the bottom of the page where one word was written, the dramatic tail of ink drifting off the edge of the page implying the condition of the writer.

_Hurry_

She flew along the corridors, encountering no one save the occasional ghost at this late hour. She had done nothing but throw on her cloak over her school clothes; she was fairly sure the suspended rules meant she was permitted to enter the study fully clothed.

His office door opened for her before she touched the door handle and the study door followed suit. The gas lamp flared to light as she entered the room where she had been spanked and fingered and licked and sucked past the point of sanity by the man whom she now sought. Her heart raced with fear, though, rather than anticipation as she moved into the room, searching for a portrait. She did not recall ever seeing one before, but it hung on the far side of the room, almost in the corner, behind the table upon which she had lain while her professor devoured her quim like the succulent fruit of a ripe pomegranate. Trying to push the erotic memory from her, she approached the long, narrow portrait and halted before it.

The name plate on the bottom edge of the wooden frame proclaimed, _Salazar Slytherin._

The occupant was an old man clad in rather opulent robes; he wore a pointed wizard’s hat, and his unfriendly eyes looked her up and down as his lip curled disdainfully. ‘Mudblood!’ he spat.

‘Hermione Granger,’ she returned, anger clearing her thoughts of everything but her objective: to get to her professor. ‘Shut up and do your _job._’

Slytherin’s long arms crossed over his loden green velvet robes, which were heavily embroidered with silver thread. ‘And what gift did the Head of Slytherin House give to you, Mudblood?’ he demanded.

‘A hairbrush,’ she replied tersely, and the portrait swung forward, granting her entry to the private chambers of Professor Severus Snape.
Chapter 19 - Hurt and Comfort

For the Potions Master’s Amusement

Chapter 19: Hurt and Comfort

The room which she entered from his study was a cosy sitting room dominated by a massive fireplace. Before the fireplace was a loveseat upholstered in burgundy brocade, flanked on either side by bottle green armchairs with high backs. The rug upon the stone floor was a thick woollen oriental, dark green and figured in wine red and gold.

But the most amazing feature of the room, to Hermione’s way of thinking, was the proliferation of bulging bookshelves which lined every inch of available wall space. She saw leather-bound volumes in every colour, some with writing on the spines in languages other than English, some even marked by ancient runes. She also saw a plethora of textbooks on every subject and every level, from the simple overviews of the first-year curriculum to thick, promising-looking texts of an undoubtedly advanced level of study. Most surprising of all were the familiar paperback books by Muggle authors, two of which rested upon a table beside one of the armchairs—but before she had the chance to investigate their titles, a voice called to her from the next room.

‘Headmaster?’

Hermione advanced to the doorway. ‘No, sir, it’s me—Hermione.’

He lay sprawled upon the double bed, his twin to her journal clutched in one ink-smeared hand. He had managed to shed his cloak—Death Eater! her mind screamed as she recognised the hooded garment—and his coat, both of which were abandoned on the plain dark rug beside his bed. He was still wearing a white broadcloth shirt, unbuttoned to reveal pale flesh, and black wool trousers above his booted feet.

Hermione noted it all as she hurried toward him, her heart in throat. His face was haggard and grey, twisted with pain, and the flesh of his chest was smeared with bright red blood.
‘Sir!’ she gasped, stopping at the edge of his bed, afraid to touch him. ‘What happened?’

His hand darted out and closed over her wrist, his black eyes glittering malevolently from his ashen face. ‘Can’t go to Poppy,’ he said. ‘She’ll tell him—and I can’t see him now—not strong enough.’

His head fell back on his pillows, and his eyes closed as he wheezed open-mouthed panting breaths, but he did not release his hold upon her wrist. Hermione swallowed past the fear in her throat. ‘Sir, please let me fetch Madam Pomfrey—I don’t know what to do!’

His grip tightened painfully, and Hermione became aware of the deadly strength in those long fingers—he could undoubtedly snap her wrist if he chose.

‘No,’ he panted, ‘you help.’ His eyes opened again, and she was riveted by their burning intensity. ‘Help me,’ he insisted.

‘I don’t know what happened to you,’ she whimpered, scrabbling to push his grip from her wrist. ‘I don’t know what to do.’ He countered her efforts to remove his hand from her arm by tightening yet again, and she cried out in pain. ‘You’re hurting me!’

Immediately he released her, only to catch her fingers and bring them to his lips, a new pain passing across his features. ‘Forgive me,’ he said. Then, ‘Help me.’

‘Tell me what to do,’ she responded as he nursed her hand to his cheek, rubbing his stubbled face against her sensitive fingers.

‘Healing potion for internal injury,’ he said, and Hermione felt as if someone had poured ice water in her veins. He had internal injuries? He said, ‘In locked cabinet in bathroom. Pale blue.’

Hermione looked around the room and saw the door to the bathroom behind her. ‘How do I unlock the cabinet?’

‘Password is lethe,’ he gasped, turning his face away from her as pain wracked him.

Hermione gently disentangled her fingers and hurried into the bathroom, lighting the gas lamp with a
wave of her wand. Directly above the sink, where most people hung mirrors, a painting of a coiling green serpent fronted a deep cabinet. Hermione stared at the snake for a moment before saying, ‘*Lethe.*’

The painting swung forward, and Hermione was confronted by a very well-stocked potions cupboard. The potions were meticulously labelled in her professor’s handwriting, but she did not bother to read the names; her eye sought out the pale blue formula, verified the name on it, and she rushed back to Professor Snape, uncorking it as she scurried.

‘Can you lift your head to swallow it?’ she asked, and he raised himself on his elbows, manfully swallowing the nasty-smelling stuff she poured into his mouth.

‘Now,’ he said, his head sagging again onto the pillow, ‘pain potion.’

‘The pink one?’ she asked, thinking of the potion Madam Pomfrey gave for headaches.

‘*Soulagement,*’ he said. ‘Narcotic. It’s clear.’

Hermione returned to the open cupboard, first snatching up a phial of Veritaserum before she found the tiny one labelled *Soulagement*. Then she was beside him again, pouring the potion into his mouth. This one he snatched from her hand, sucking on the bottle when it was empty, his tongue licking the residue from the lip of the phial.

Then his head fell softly onto his pillow, his face relaxing.

‘Better?’ she whispered, but he was unconscious.

Hermione sat down on the edge of the bed and stroked his beard-roughened face, smoothing his stringy, oily hair away from his brow. Who had hurt him? And what had they done to him? And why? It was simply horrific.

He slept heavily, the narcotic pain potion bringing him the relief he needed. Hermione shifted around to look at his body. Could she undress him and clean his wounds without disturbing him? She rather thought she would be able to do it. Tentatively, she reached out and twitched the sides of his shirt open, revealing his chest and belly down to his trousers. Her breath caught in her throat at the sight of the body she had so longed to see and touch—and to see the angry slashes, as if someone
had sliced at him with a penknife, did nothing to detract from the beauty of his lean, toned frame. Working with a feather-light touch, she magically cleansed the wounds, then healed them, wielding her wand surely over his torso, which was already criss-crossed with the pale stripes of scars from old injuries long healed.

When she had completely healed the cuts, she dared simply to stroke down his sternum through the sparse black hairs growing between his nipples. Were his nipples sensitive, as hers were? Would it be wrong to lick them while he was sleeping? She satisfied herself for now by stroking over his nipples and trailing her hands down his ribcage, noting as she did so that he was far too thin. Next she stroked the plane of his stomach, dipping a finger in his navel, then following the line of dark, thickening hair leading down into his trousers.

Wouldn’t he be more comfortable if she unbuckled his belt and pulled his trousers off? She would leave his underpants on him, of course, but wouldn’t it be better for him not to be burdened with the heavy clothing? Her fingertips lingered on the silver of his belt buckle, and she reminisced about the times he bent her over and spanked her naked bottom with this belt. Her quim tingled with the memory, and she longed to reach her hand down into his pants and touch him, stroke him and pleasure him as he had done for her so many times.

Then she noticed the smear of blood on her fingertip, and looking down, she saw with distaste that she had his blood on her blouse. She stood up from the bed and recognised her thoughts for what they were: she had been considering molesting her sleeping, injured professor while he was helpless to defend himself. What was wrong with her?

She went into his bathroom and closed the potions cupboard, staying to scrub her hands at the sink. She really needed a bath and something clean to wear, but she didn’t want to leave him. She wasn’t sure what was wrong with him or how long he would sleep—she didn’t want him to wake up and find her gone. Still, she could bathe in his bathtub and leave the door open—she would surely hear him if he woke and stirred.

She undressed, studying her professor’s personal bathroom. The old claw-footed tub was separate from the more modern shower, which he obviously used more often. In the shower was a tall, clear container of a viscous fluid that looked like shampoo—did he create his own? —and in its dish, a cake of soap the scent of which she had recognised when she entered the bathroom, for he always smelled of it. She twisted the taps to fill the tube and noticed it did not have soap, so she reached into the shower and lifted his from its holder, smiling at the familiar fragrance. She magicked her hair up and out of her way, then climbed into the warm bathwater and began to bathe with his soap, feeling as if his hands were the ones stroking her flesh.

Clean and wrapped in a fluffy white bath towel, Hermione went into the bedroom again and stood beside the bed, watching her professor sleep. When she was convinced that he was resting comfortably, she looked about the room, curiosity kicking in now that the crisis was past.
The stone walls were hung on all sides by old tapestries depicting scenes from wizarding lore. Many of the scenes were improbable at best, and Hermione guessed that her professor had chosen to hang the tapestries for the protection they provided from the cold walls of the underwater room. The rug here was not as nice as the one in the sitting room, being an unadorned dark green. The double bed was in the centre of the far wall with bedside tables on either side. The duvet upon which the professor lay was dark green, as well, although his pillowcase was crisp white linen. There was a chest of drawers, upon the top of which was a comb, a ceramic bowl containing a handful of Sickles, an open wooden box containing several sets of cufflinks, and one framed photograph. Hermione was instantly drawn to the photograph, though she did not touch it.

In the simple silver frame, a weedy-looking boy with a large hooked nose and untidy long black hair stood beside a thin-lipped, heavy-jawed woman. On the other side of the boy was a sleeve and the ragged edge of the photograph, where it had been ripped. Had Professor Snape ripped his father out of the picture, or had it been someone else? What had been special about this day, that a photograph had been taken? Hermione bent closer to the picture and saw that the boy held before him a wand, held it proudly, his eyes shining in the wizarding photograph as he pivoted and brandished it. His mother frowned and reprimanded him, but the boy with his brand new wand paid her no mind. Hermione smiled to see the devilish grin the boy wore when he waved his wand and produced a lovely shower of multi-coloured sparks.

Hermione shivered with the cold as the warmth of her bath faded away, and she turned to the wardrobe, opening it, hoping to find a dressing gown. The scent of the professor’s aftershave wafted out the wardrobe door, and Hermione took a deep breath, filling her lungs with it. Within, she saw his black coats and black trousers hung neatly side-by-side. She saw a glimmer of satin and pulled a simple black dressing gown from its hanger, wrapping herself in it and turning the sleeves back to free her hands. It was covering, but it was not particularly warm, so if she was going to watch over him tonight, it was going to be from beneath the bedcovers.

Determinedly, Hermione took up her wand and levitated her professor, making sure her spell was steady before hastening to turn down the bedclothes. When she had him lying upon his back, clothed in only his trousers and socks, she pulled the covers up to his shoulders and went to the other side of the bed to slide in beside him. It was warm beneath the duvet and blankets, and although she meant to stay awake and keep watch over him, she was soon asleep, naturally gravitating across the bed to the sure source of warmth provided by the sleeping Severus Snape.

Desire filled her as she floated on a cloud of bliss. Sensations of pleasure flooded her body, tingling along her sensory pathways, and she murmured in her sleep, feeling arousal as it pooled in her quim.
She reached for the source and found it at her breast; her fingers twined in the hair and she tugged, pressing her breast more firmly into the suckling mouth. A talented tongue laved her nipples, back and forth, back and forth, and the incredible sensation brought a moan from her throat as she began to wriggle her hips, seeking sensation for her quim.

‘Greedy,’ the raspy voice said, and Hermione was awake in a strange room, lying upon her side in bed with someone burrowing into the dressing gown she wore, seeking out and finding her breasts, licking and sucking and driving her wild.

‘Sir,’ she said, but he only hummed contently as he nuzzled and suckled; by the light of the single candle, Hermione could see his pale shoulders bunch as he used his hands to push her breasts together, seeking to pull both nipples into his mouth at once. He succeeded with a growl of satisfaction, and she cried out at the intensity of the sensation, suddenly needing a cock inside of her more than anything else she could imagine. ‘Please,’ she breathed, shifting the lower part of her body closer to his.

He stilled her with one hand, snaking down to untie the dressing gown and spread it open, baring her to his fevered gaze. She placed her hand then upon his forehead, realising he was feverish—this was a fever dream, for him.

‘Stop,’ she said, but his questing fingers found her quim, and he claimed her, fingering her expertly as his mouth sought and found again her nipple, still slick with his saliva.

Hermione knew it was wrong—somehow, she should make him stop and lie back and rest—but she was so aroused, so fucking hot from his nipple sucking madness that she could only spread her legs and let him finger fuck her.

‘That’s right,’ he purred, listening to her moaning response to his touches. His teeth scraped lightly over her tightly furled nipple, and she gasped. ‘Good girl,’ he praised, and sucked her nipple into his mouth even as his thumb circled her clitoris.

Hermione writhed beneath his ministrations, managing only to caress his shoulders and tangle her hands in his hair, unable to reach any other part of him as he pleasured her. Dear Merlin, she would do something for him after this—pump her hand up and down his cock, or lick and suck him, yes she would …

He released her nipple and nuzzled beneath the curve of her breast, sucking the soft skin into his mouth, exerting the suction that would mark her with his love bite, but all she could do was buck against his hand again and again and again until she climaxed, for which she was rewarded by the
hand which cupped her mound with a gentle squeeze.

‘Good girl,’ he murmured again, his large nose burrowing between her breasts.

‘Let me …’ she began, trying to reach for him, but he was asleep again, clinging to her as if she were his own personal breasted teddy.

When next they woke, he was groaning and rolling away from her, but not before she felt the terrible burning fever in his face.

‘Help me to the bathroom,’ he said, rising shakily to a sitting position.

Hermione hurried around the bed, retying the dressing gown as she went. She was surprised that he was well enough to sit up, but obviously the healing potion was doing its job. What she couldn’t understand was his fever—what was causing it?

When she got him settled again in his bed after he used the facilities, he clutched a rainbow of potions from his cupboard in one hand. He fixed his glittering, feverish gaze upon her. ‘Go to class,’ he said, ‘but come back to me this afternoon with food. I should be able to eat by then.’

Hermione took the phials from him and lined them up on the tabletop within his reach. ‘Let me call Madam Pomfrey for you,’ she pled.

‘No,’ he said and downed the light blue potion for healing internal injuries.

‘I could ask the Headmaster to come see you,’ she tried again, accepting the empty phial from him.

‘No!’ he snapped, closing his eyes wearily. ‘I can’t see Poppy because I won’t see Dumbledore—not until I’ve recovered some of my strength.’
She cupped his cheek. ‘But I’m worried about your fever,’ she explained.

His eyes opened he managed half a smile. ‘The fever means the internal injuries are healing,’ he assured her.

‘How were you injured?’ she asked, wishing she could stay with him.

His eyelids drifted closed again. ‘I’ll tell you later—when you come back with food.’ His voice sounded strained and weary.

‘But you need food now!’ she protested.

‘No, I need sleep,’ he mumbled, turning on his side. His eyes opened again, and he looked into her eyes. ‘Come back this afternoon and bring me food—and I’ll lick your pretty little cunt until you come all over my face.’

Hermione chuckled weakly, not wanting to leave him alone, but knowing she would have to go—there would be no way for her to miss an entire day of classes without raising questions she did not want to try to answer. ‘Well, when you put it like that,’ she said softly.

He tugged at her dressing gown. ‘Leave it with me,’ he said.

Hermione stood and slipped out of it. ‘Of course I’ll leave it with you—it’s yours,’ she teased.

He lifted the garment to his face, inhaling deeply. ‘Smells like you,’ he said—then a spasm crossed his face, and Hermione knew he was in pain again.

She poured the pain potion into his mouth and he subsided onto his pillow. She dressed in yesterday’s clothes, leaving him sleeping like the dead as she crept out into the castle corridors to make her way back to her room and prepare for her day.
A/N: *Soulagement* is, according to Babelfish, French for ‘relief’.
She was out of her Astronomy class by two o’clock, and after returning to her room to pack a few essentials, she slipped down to the kitchens and procured provisions for the afternoon and evening. Part of her mind worried over Professor Snape’s physical health, wondering if his fever would be better by the time she reached him and how soon he would be well enough to return to the classroom. Another part of her mind returned over and again to dwell on the night before. He had never been so unguarded with her … so normal. He might have been just any bloke, under the weather and being nursed by his girlfriend—except he wasn’t just any bloke. He was Severus Snape, her professor, yes, but more importantly, her Dominant—and the mere thought of him brought an ache deep in her tummy which resonated all the way to her quim.

Properly supplied, she slipped away to the dungeons, and by half-past two, she was standing in her professor’s bedroom, watching him sleep. Resisting the urge to smooth his hair back from his brow, she noted that his colour was better than before. He was breathing normally and resting well. Satisfied with his condition, she reached into the magical container the house-elves had provided, galvanised by her tale of a “sick friend”. Kneeling upon the floor, she placed the bowl of steaming chicken broth on the bed tray and added the bread, warm from the oven.

‘I’m hungry enough to eat a Hippogriff.’

Hermione glanced over her shoulder and found Professor Snape propped now on two pillows and watching her with keen interest.

‘How are you?’ she asked, standing to carry the tray to him.
‘Damnably weak,’ he admitted, his nostrils flaring at the aroma of the soup. ‘Please tell me you’ve brought me more than soup.’

Hermione settled the tray over his torso. ‘First, you have to eat something easy to digest—it’s been a while since you’ve eaten, and you’re ill.’

His lip curled derisively, but he did not argue; he was far too busy spooning the fragrant broth into his mouth with a somewhat unsteady hand. Hermione hesitated at his side, wondering if she should offer to feed him, but she wasn’t sure how a dominant male would react to such a proposition. In the end she remained silent, and he managed well enough. She didn’t want to do anything that might interfere with her receiving her promised reward. Was it wrong of her to want his mouth on her quim when he was unwell? She tried to feel badly about it, but the ache between her legs wouldn’t let her—she needed sexual satisfaction from him.

When he laid down his spoon, his eyes lit upon her face. ‘Thank you,’ he said quietly. ‘You’ve done me a great service.’

Hermione flushed with pleasure at the praise and stood to remove the tray from him. Standing beside the bed, she shifted from one foot to the other. What should she do now? Ask for her reward?

‘Come here,’ he said, and the silk of his voice reached for her, wrapping her in tendrils which drew her to him like moth to the flame. She crawled up beside him, resuming the place she had occupied the night before, resting on her side.

His eyes closed, as if the broth had contained a soporific, and his fingers sought hers upon the bedclothes. Hermione smiled when his large hand closed gently around hers.

‘Were you questioned concerning your whereabouts last night?’ he asked, his eyes still closed.

‘No one noticed,’ she replied. ‘Why are you keeping your presence a secret?’

His eyes opened, and he turned his face to hers. ‘Do you think it would be a good thing for the Headmaster to become aware of the nature of our association?’ he inquired mildly.
‘Good God, no!’ Hermione blurted.

The professor’s mouth quirked, and he closed his eyes again. ‘My thoughts exactly,’ he murmured. ‘The Headmaster is a great Legilimens, Hermione. It is his greatest weapon, I think, for he routinely steals into the minds of the unsuspecting to investigate their thoughts and memories.’ A sardonic smile touched his thin lips. ‘The Headmaster is … unaware of my proclivities, in spite of regular forays into my mind. I am able to segregate those thoughts and memories from him by the use of Occlumency.’ His eyes opened and again, seeking hers. ‘I believe you know about that.’

Hermione nodded. ‘Harry wasn’t good at it,’ she said matter-of-factly.

Professor Snape snorted. ‘Maintaining Occlumency shields requires a great deal of one’s magic,’ he said, continuing on as if she had not brought up her friend. ‘In a weakened state, such as I am now, I would have a difficult time maintaining my shields against the Headmaster’s probing. If he discovered my interest in Dominance and submission, that would not necessarily be a bad thing, but if he discovered my association with you …’

Hermione blanched at the very thought. The Headmaster could never understand the relationship between Professor Snape and her! In fact, no one she knew would be able to understand it. They would think the professor was abusing his authority and position—was abusing her—and they might even believe the professor had put a spell on her to make her submit. They would never be able to understand her need of the discipline he provided—her desire to receive his attentions precisely as he offered them. No, it would be a very bad thing for anyone she knew to find out the particulars of her association with Severus Snape. Only someone from within the D/s community would understand …

His breathing deepened, and Hermione realised he was sleeping. Pulling up the duvet, she closed her eyes, revelling in her presence in his bed, remembering all the times she had dreamed of being in it with him. And although she had not thought she would, she drifted off into sleep.

She awoke over an hour later to his empty pillow, and she saw him standing in the doorway of the bathroom, steam billowing around him as he rubbed his hair with a towel, wearing another about his hips. Hermione was instantly smitten with want. What would he do if she crossed the floor and knelt at his feet and pulled open the towel …
'Stay where you are,' he ordered, his voice sounding slightly amused.

‘I didn’t move!’ she objected, flushing.

He moved to the chest, tugging a pair of pyjama bottoms from a drawer and pulling them on too quickly for Hermione to get a good look at him. Then he turned to face her, dragging a comb through his hair. ‘Are you arguing with me, Hermione?’ he inquired in a deceptively gentle tone.

‘No, sir,’ she answered instantly, butterflies beginning to dart about in her tummy. Oh, *this was her* professor—he seemed back to normal. She had best watch her step. She drew in a deep breath, trying to calm the wild beating of her heart, and waited to see what he would do next.

‘You’re a bit overdressed, are you not?’ he said, replacing the comb and shaking his hair back from his face.

Hermione scrambled across the bed and onto her feet. ‘You said the rules weren’t in force!’ she cried. ‘I—’

‘Relax,’ he said, walking past her to the bed and stretching out, resting his head upon his pillow. His eyes travelled from her face down to her feet. ‘I am inviting you to make yourself more comfortable—you are not required to do so.’ A sly look came into his eyes. ‘And there is the small matter of your reward …’

Hermione didn’t hesitate. She pulled her jumper over her head and fumbled at the buttons of her blouse, frantic to receive his touch.

‘Slow down, girl,’ he drawled, and her head jerked up to meet his heated gaze. ‘If you are going to strip for me, do it slowly so that I may enjoy it.’

Hermione felt two things simultaneously: pleasure at his desire to watch her undress, and determination to meet his challenge. Under any other circumstances, she would be embarrassed to have someone watch her take her clothes off, but this was her Dominant—she was hard-wired to please him, and in so doing, providing pleasure for them both.

Deliberately holding his eyes, she unbuttoned her blouse slowly, and when finished, she turned her back to him, allowing it to slip from her arms as she cast him a coquettish look over her shoulder.
His lazy smile of approval encouraged her, and she reached behind her back with both hands to unfasten her bra, sliding each strap off her shoulders, then turning to face him again, one arm covering her breasts as she threw the flimsy bit of pale pink satin and lace onto the bedclothes. A sexy snarl touched his lips as he lifted the brassiere to his face.

Emboldened by his reaction, she slowly turned her back to him again as she wriggled out of her skirt, taking her tights down as well. Then she swirled around, moving her arms gracefully out from her body, and struck a pose for him, clad only in the knickers which matched the bra he held.

He put the pink satin from him and spoke to her in a gruff voice. ‘Come here,’ he said.

She reached for the elastic on the knickers, to pull them off.

‘Leave them,’ he snapped. ‘Do as you’re told.’

Hermione walked the few steps to stand at his side. He took her arm and pulled at her. ‘Climb on top of me,’ he said, and she did so, awkwardly. Trying to support her weight on her arms, she laid along the length of his body, very much aware of the erection beneath his pyjama bottoms.

‘Relax,’ he said again, nudging gently at one arm, and she allowed her full weight to rest on him, her cheek against his chest. His hands touched the bare skin of her back, smoothed along the fabric of her knickers, pausing to squeeze the cheeks of her bum, then clasped her waist, holding her still as he thrust up against her. Hermione immediately squirmed higher, wanting any thrusting to be directly against her aching quim. He chuckled. ‘What do you want, Hermione?’ he asked.

‘Fuck me,’ she breathed, lifting her face to see his expression.

‘That’s not what I promised you,’ he pointed out, his warm hands travelling up and down her back. ‘Don’t you want me to lick your cunt?’

‘Yes!’ she said, squirming again, trying to rock against the hardness beneath his pyjama trousers.

‘Then turn around so that your bottom is at my face,’ he instructed.
His hands let her move, and she slid off. She couldn’t imagine how on earth she could do as he told her—where would she put her legs and feet?

‘Your knees will be on either side of my chest,’ he said as she reversed directions.

‘Shouldn’t I take off my knickers?’ she asked as she rose up onto her knees.

‘No,’ he answered shortly. ‘Come along.’

Awkwardly, she straddled his chest, feeling unbelievably rude. What if she passed gas? She was burning with mortification.

‘Relax,’ he said for the third time, and then he murmured a word she could not distinguish, and unaccountably, she felt air on her quim—but she still felt the elastic at her hips—had he disappeared the crotch of the garment? ‘Move back,’ he instructed her, his hands at her hips, pulling her closer until she felt the balls of her feet make contact with the headboard. ‘That’s right,’ he purred, and suddenly, his fingers were spreading the lips of her labia. ‘Good girl,’ he whispered, just before his tongue laved her from her perineum to her clitoris and back again.

‘Dear Merlin,’ Hermione moaned, moving back convulsively against his face, feeling his nose against her cunt as she squirmed for contact with his tongue.

He sucked her clitoris into his mouth and teased it with his tongue, the low growl in his throat vibrating against her flesh in an erotically menacing way. Hermione clutched at the bed sheets, rocking against his face, all concern for the inelegance of her position forgotten. When she chanced to open her eyes, she found herself facing his rather formidable erection, jutting up in his otherwise unremarkable grey cotton pyjama bottoms. She reached out a tentative hand and grasped him through the fabric, wondering if she could stretch far enough to take him into her mouth without disrupting the exquisite havoc he was wreaking with his lips closed about her clitoris.

She scarcely had time to consider, for at her touch, his hands jerked her insistently backwards so that she virtually sat upon his face, making it more difficult for her hands to reach his protruding cock. Giving up with a groan, she allowed her eyes to close and concentrated on the divine things he was doing to her quim, eating her out with abandon, heedless of her slick private parts sliding about on the lower portion of his face. She became aware of his hands slipping beneath the elastic at the legs of her now crotchless knickers. He kneaded the cheeks of her bottom as he worried at her clitoris, alternately licking and sucking, varying his touches according to the sounds she made. Suddenly, she felt him part her bum cheeks, and one long finger lightly caressed the bud of her arse as he flattened her clitoris against the roof of his mouth and sucked.
'Sweet Circe!' she cried, the swell of her climax breaking over her like a tidal wave. She cried out repeatedly, undulating against his face even as the tip of his wicked finger probed her arsehole, somehow increasing the sensation of her orgasm to a new fever pitch.

When she lay limp atop him, panting for breath and completely sated, he patted her bum and said, ‘Come here and clean my face, little slut.’

Willingly, she rolled from atop him and reversed directions, crawling up into the cradle of waiting arms. He watched her with avid eyes which darkened with pleasure as she lapped at his flesh like a kitten licking milk from his chin. His lips parted when she licked his mouth, and then they were kissing, his tongue thrusting into her mouth, bringing the flavour of her own juices to season their embrace. Hermione stroked her hand along his bare back as they kissed, thrilling to the hard, lean muscle she felt beneath her fingertips. He nipped at her lips and thrust his hips against her, and her hand angled to his hip and down, to fondle him through his pyjamas. He permitted it for a few moments, his murmuring sighs issuing into her mouth. She stroked down his length and cradled his scrotum before she reached for his waistband to pull the elastic down and free him to her touch and taste.

‘No,’ he whispered, capturing her hand and bringing it to his face.

‘Let me please you,’ she coaxed, pressing light kisses to his face.

‘I have to sleep,’ he said, rolling onto his back, his voice suddenly heavy with fatigue.

Hermione sighed, staring at his gaunt cheeks, noting that he still didn’t look well. What was wrong with her? Why did she persist in attempting to molest a sick man?

‘Should I go?’ she asked.

‘Stay,’ he said, reaching for her hand.

Hermione placed her hand in his and pulled up the duvet, laying her head upon her pillow as his breathing deepened again.
She was dozing lightly when he awoke again.

‘What time is it?’ he asked, his voice rough with sleep.

She picked up her wand and lit more candles, squinting at her wristwatch. ‘It’s six o’clock,’ she told him.

‘Please tell me you have real food in that bag,’ he said, and his stomach rumbled loudly, as if in agreement.

Hermione laughed softly, tugging the dressing gown she had worn the night before from its place beneath his pillow and rolling out of the bed. ‘I think I can accommodate you,’ she answered as she pulled the garment on, tightening the belt and rolling back the sleeves to free her hands.

They made a good meal of sliced turkey, roast potatoes, and green peas, washed down with goblets full of cold milk. For pudding, they shared a piece of apple pie. Hermione was in heaven. What could be better than a picnic in the middle of bed with a half-naked Potions master who was in such a benign mood? He ate heartily, showing signs of increased strength and vigour—and he permitted her to question him about his academic career.

‘I completed my apprenticeship in the usual three years,’ he said, scraping the last bite from the pie dish. ‘It was just in time to take the open position here, at Hogwarts.’

Hermione accepted the empty pie plate and reached to pile it with the other used dishes on the nearest bedside table. ‘Was it difficult to find a master to study with?’ she asked.

He shifted his position, sitting up straighter against the headboard as he wiped his thin lips with the white linen napkin. ‘The Dark Lord arranged it for me,’ he answered at last.

Hermione’s eyes grew round. ‘Was it … was your master a …’ she stopped, unable to complete the question.
Professor Snape quirked an eyebrow at her. ‘Was Master Jiggs a Death Eater?’ At Hermione’s nod, he continued, ‘No, he was not. He was, however, a pure-blood and a former Slytherin, and he had an impressive library on Dark potions.’

Hermione couldn’t help the spark of interest that flared at this revelation. ‘Do you know a lot of Dark potions?’ she asked.

His eyes narrowed and travelled insolently down her body. ‘I know many Dark potions and Dark spells,’ he said, his voice low and seductive. ‘What is your interest in such things, Hermione?’

She shifted under his gaze, amazed that her womb responded with insistent aching to the tone of his velvet voice, despite the tongue lashing she had already endured at his hands this day. ‘Well, it’s knowledge, isn’t it?’ she said. ‘Even if you don’t want to practice the Dark Arts, there’s no harm in knowing the theory behind the spells and potions, is there?’

He sat forward suddenly, grabbing her wrist and toppling her against him, his hands pushing her dressing gown open before unerringly closing on her breasts. His thumbs passed over her nipples, then he pinched them gently between his thumbs and forefingers, rolling them until she moaned aloud.

‘Does that feel good?’ he purred, his eyes glittering.

‘Yes!’ she gasped, arching into his touch.

‘Where do you feel it?’ he inquired, increasing the pressure on her nipples, drawing a lower moan from her.

‘Where you’re touching me,’ she answered.

‘And?’ he demanded, tugging at her hardened nipples.

‘In my quim,’ she said, feeling that part of her body throbbing with the stimulation to her breasts.
‘And what if I were able to induce this feeling in you without touching you—what if I could make you feel like this by cursing an article of your clothing, or by spiking your morning pumpkin juice with a potion?’

‘It—it might be exciting,’ she said, leaning into him, and he smiled, lowering his head to kiss first one nipple, then the other.

‘Yes,’ he said, plucking at her nipples, sending chills of want racing along her nerve endings, ‘it might be exciting if we both wanted you to feel these things—but what if you didn’t like me? Or didn’t know me? What if my intentions in doing that to you were less than benign?’

His words penetrated the fog of desire, and Hermione gave her head a tiny shake, as if to clear her mind. She frowned, sitting back from him, tugging the dressing gown over her aching breasts. ‘In that case—if we weren’t both consenting—it would be horrid,’ she admitted. ‘It would be sick and wrong.’

He nodded, twitching the dressing gown open again to bare her breasts to his eyes but not touching them. ‘There are many different types of Dark Arts spells,’ he said gravely, ‘many so horrid you would never consider using them—but some are less heinous, almost innocuous, and you think to yourself, using this one won’t hurt anyone …’

Hermione listened to him, struck by the meditative tone of his voice—and she realised that he was telling her something about himself.

‘Then one day, when you’re really angry with someone about something, you use a slightly more malevolent spell, feeling that you’re quite justified in doing so.’ He reached for her again, pulling her to him and twisting her slightly so that she lay across his chest. He lowered his face and began to suck upon her nipple with a gentleness bordering upon reverence, one arm supporting her, the opposite hand fondling her other breast, stimulating her nipple, sending ripples of pleasure through her. He raised his face and looked into her eyes. ‘It is much better not to know the Dark Arts,’ he said, continuing to caress her breasts. ‘I would like for you to trust me in this, Hermione. Will you do so?’

‘Yes,’ she answered immediately, her heart rate increasing at the expression in his eyes as he looked at her. She picked up the hand at her breast and brought it to her face, pressing a kiss to the palm of his hand. ‘Of course I will do anything you ask of me.’

He grasped her arms and pulled her up so that her breasts were pressed against his naked chest, and a wash of pure desire for him assailed her. He kissed her mouth, his arms crushing her to him
urgently, and she opened her mouth to him, opened her very soul to him, wanting his cock inside of her body to seal the deal—dear God, she had to belong to him, body and soul.

They kissed until she was a languid puddle of slick longing, when his lips nibbled at her earlobe, and he said, ‘Will you do something for me, little one? Something of a sexual nature?’

She squirmed against him, her fingertips trailing down his belly towards his straining erection. ‘Anything,’ she averred.

He released her and settled back against the headboard, his black eyes glittering oddly in the candlelight.

‘Good girl,’ he murmured. ‘I want you to move to the foot of the bed, the corner opposite from me, and sit facing me—without the dressing gown.’

Move away from him? How could she touch him and kiss him and lick him and fuck him from across the bed? But she had said she would do as he asked, so she swallowed her disappointment and shrugged out of the dressing gown, leaving it behind as she crawled across the bed and settled as he had asked her to.

He picked up his wand from the bedside table and murmured a spell. Hermione was suddenly illuminated in a bright shaft of light. ‘Lovely,’ he said, eyeing her up. ‘You’ve been a tremendous help to me, Hermione,’ he said. ‘You’ve earned a fuck, if you wanted one, but I’m not, as they say, “up” to it, tonight—I haven’t recovered enough of my strength to do the thing properly.’

Hermione watched him, wondering what he was up to. She was happy to know she had ‘earned a fuck’, whatever that meant, but if she couldn’t have it, then what was she supposed to do?

‘You want to see my cock, don’t you, little one?’

Hermione felt her mouth gape open. She certainly did want to see his cock. She wanted to see it and touch it and taste it and suck it and ride it and … ‘Yes, sir—please!’ she said.

‘Of course,’ he added, raising his knees slightly and sliding the palm of his hand over the bulge in his pyjama trousers, ‘in your fantasy, I had you tied to the bed when you saw my cock for the first time.’
Hermione gasped. ‘You read it?’ she blurted, distracted from the knowing way his left hand handled his erection.

‘Yes, before you removed the pages,’ he said, sounding suddenly stern. ‘That will be a discussion for another time—unless you would prefer to discuss it now?’ His hand stopped caressing his length and he cocked his head slightly, as if inviting her answer.

‘No!’ she cried, adding hastily, ‘sir.’ Hermione bit her lip. Damn, she had hoped it would not be necessary to explain how the pages had been removed from her journal. ‘Please—continue.’

‘Spread your legs wide,’ he ordered her, suddenly falling into the attitude of the dominant who had handled her so efficiently in his study. ‘Raise your knees a bit and put your feet on the bed,’ he instructed. ‘Yes, good.’

Hermione tried not to feel like a bug under glass as he ordered her about. It was so much easier to do what he asked when his hands were on her body, delivering discipline or enticing her to orgasm. It was another thing entirely to be sitting, naked, across from him and following instructions.

But it was about to become more difficult.

‘Spread your cunt lips and stick a finger inside,’ he commanded.

Hermione reached down and spread her labia with the fingers of her left hand, feeling her face burn with shame, and inserted her right forefinger.

‘Look at me,’ he said, his voice inviting, and she lifted her eyes to see that he had magicked the pyjamas off and she could see him, entirely naked.

She drew in a shaky, ragged breath as her eyes feasted on him, noting every detail. He was uncircumcised and well endowed, his cock both slightly thicker and slightly longer than those she had seen in pictures. His scrotum was heavy, hanging above what she could see of the crack of his bum, but her eyes were drawn back to his cock, which jutted up proudly, demanding her attention. As she watched, his fist closed about the shaft and stroked down once, pulling the foreskin fully down and exposing the dark pink knob.
‘Gather moisture in your cunt and get your fingers wet,’ he instructed, reminding her that she was sitting with a finger inside of herself.

She brought the tips of her fingers together, making them slick.

‘Now, get the other hand wet with your juice,’ he said, his voice soothing, sexy, as if what he were asking was perfectly normal and reasonable.

She repeated the process with her left hand.

‘Rub it on your nipples,’ he instructed, and when she did, he moaned.

Her eyes were drawn to his face, and the look of undisguised lust left her breathless.

‘Pinch them,’ he said, and as she did, he ran his right hand over his own nipples, pinching first one, then the other, his left hand never leaving off the slow, sure pumping motion up and down his shaft.

Hermione watched him, wanting that cock inside of her, feeling her body flood with warmth and wetness, as if in preparation to take him on.

‘Look at my face,’ he murmured, his tone slightly teasing, as if he knew how hard it was for her to look away from him fisting his erection. She raised her eyes to his. ‘Now,’ he continued, ‘pinch your nipples, Hermione—pinch them, slowly increasing the pressure, until it hurts you.’ His eyes flicked down to her quim, then back to her face. ‘Do it now.’

Hermione had never much relished the idea of hurting her breasts. She had read about it, and the idea had never appealed to her. Of course, until her professor had confessed his admiration for her breasts—her perfect breasts—and made love to them for an extended period of time, she had never realised how much pleasure they could bring to her. Taking a deep breath, she began to pinch, slowly increasing the pressure until it really hurt … and still, she felt an odd ache in her quim, in spite of the pain …

‘Sweet Merlin,’ he whispered, and Hermione breathed slowly through her mouth, panting through the discomfort. ‘You should see your face, little one,’ he said, wanking a little faster. ‘You’re beautiful when you accept the pain I give you.’ He spread his thighs a little wider, hips thrusting as he fucked his fist. ‘You can stop pinching now and lift your breasts to your face—it will be a stretch,
but I want you to kiss and lick each nipple. It will feel very good, I promise you.’

It was difficult, but by curving her neck down as far as possible and pushing her breast up, she was able to touch each nipple with her tongue. Each time she did it, he moaned a bit more, and she lifted her head, watching him. His wrist twisted oddly with each stroke as he thrust up into his hand, but it was the expression on his face, a combination of agony and ecstasy, which mesmerised her. He was doing a filthy, disgusting thing, having her do filthy disgusting things for him to watch as he wanked, and she had never seen anything more erotic in all of her eighteen years. He was exquisite in his extremity.

‘Now finger your cunt,’ he gasped. ‘Spread it open so I can see how pink and wet your pretty little quim is, little one, and finger your clit until you come.’

With no thought any longer for how she looked to him, she obeyed his instructions and watched him, becoming more aroused and closer to her climax with each thrust of his straining cock into his fist. His balls bounced a bit against his arse with each jerk of his hips, and she was entranced by him, by his body, and by how he touched himself.

‘Come with me,’ he told her, his head falling back as his eyes closed, ‘come with me now!’

And her body convulsed, unable to resist the imperative of his command, even as he found his own release, viscous white jism erupting over his fist, the sound of his incoherent shout inexplicably empowering to her. She had brought him to this: She was powerful, indeed.

She pulled her knees to her chest, suddenly cold, and wrapped her arms about her legs as she watched her professor catch his breath. He opened his midnight eyes, even as he sagged back upon his pillows, and said, ‘Come here, little one.’

She crawled up the bed into his arms, thankful for the warmth of his body heat. He jerked the covers over their bodies and held her tightly to him, murmuring Nox and covering them over in the utter darkness of the dungeons, their breath mingling as they traded sweet, desultory kisses before sleep claimed them again.
'Hermione.'

She stirred, hearing his voice, as she always did in her dreams.

‘Hermione, wake up. You must return to your room.’

She opened her eyes, immediately squinting against the bright candlelight; it appeared that every candle in the room was lit.

‘What time is it?’ she said, struggling to sit up in the empty bed.

‘It’s half-past eleven,’ Professor Snape replied.

Hermione squinted up at him. He stood beside the bed, fully clad in his classroom attire.

‘Is it night-time?’ she asked, feeling wholly disoriented.

‘Yes,’ he answered tersely.
She studied his face, noting that though he was still pale, the ashen quality was gone from his skin. Otherwise, he seemed totally as he had been before his illness.

‘Make haste,’ he snapped, thrusting her pile of clothes at her. ‘The Headmaster is on his way down to debrief me.’

Interrupted mid-yawn by this terrifying intelligence, Hermione all but fell out of bed to scramble into her clothing. ‘But why is he coming down here?’ she cried as she wriggled into her skirt.

‘He is aware of my presence in the castle; he knows I was interrogated and … tortured by the Dark Lord. He is insistent.’

Hermione stuffed her tights into her bag and pulled on her cloak over her haphazardly buttoned blouse. ‘How could he have possibly known that?’ she asked, cramming her feet into her shoes.

‘I am not his only informant from within the Dark Lord’s circle,’ he said colourlessly, handing her both her book bag and the house-elves’ bag with their dirty dishes.

Hermione looked up into his strained face, wildly seeking some tiny thread of the intimacy they had shared for the last twenty-four hours. ‘When will I see you again?’ she asked, concerned. ‘Will you need me …’

He took her arm and propelled her out of his bedroom and through his sitting room to the door to his study. ‘Go out this way; the Headmaster will come through the Floo.’

Hermione allowed him to push past the portrait of Salazar Slytherin, then dug in her heels. ‘Wait!’ she cried, reaching for him with one hand. ‘When will I see—’

‘In class,’ he snapped and closed the portrait in her face.

Hermione stood in the professor’s study, her hair sticking out in every direction, wearing wrinkled, dishevelled clothing beneath her cloak, and felt as if she had been shoved out of a warm cocoon into the icy world beyond.
‘Well, fuck all,’ she muttered.

‘Language, Mudblood,’ the portrait admonished.

Hermione slung her book bag over her shoulder and glared at the Slytherin Founder. ‘You were not an ignorant wizard,’ she said severely. ‘How can you be so foolish as to judge a witch or wizard based on something as random as blood status?’

The silver-bearded old man sputtered with rage, but Hermione did not remain behind to hear his rejoinder. She turned on her heel and flounced away from him, back out into the cold dungeon corridor, leaving behind the idyllic time with her professor and entering back into real life.

Hermione entered her room and dropped the bags on the floor, apparently disturbing the rest of Crookshanks, who rose from her bed with a complaining mew and sprang onto the floor to twine about her ankles.

‘Hullo, old thing,’ she said, bending to stroke his fur before turning to fill his food dish.

She shrugged out of her cloak and looked at her reflection, rather taken aback by the dreadfulness of her appearance. She hadn’t even managed to button her blouse up properly! She unfastened the buttons and let the shirt fall to the floor, noting how her nipples crinkled immediately in the cold air of her room. She must have left the delicate pink bra behind in her professor’s bed. She bit her lip, remembering how he had ordered her to pinch her nipples until they hurt, then had her lick them—and all the while, he stroked himself, aroused by watching her. Tentatively, she cupped her breasts, lightly touching her nipples. Yes, they were a bit sore from her rough handling—but what would she not do if he asked her?

She unfastened her skirt and let it fall to the floor, standing now in nothing save her satiny pink knickers, now crotchless. Where the missing piece of fabric had been, she could see her pubic hair, and she could smell the odour of the dried secretions from masturbating for her Potions master’s amusement.

She stepped out of the ravaged underpants and pulled a warm nightdress from her wardrobe.
Crawling beneath the covers of her bed, she took up her green leather journal and dutifully recorded the meal she had shared with Professor Snape, as well as the naps they had taken. Putting aside her quill, she ran her fingertips over the ragged edges of the torn pages. There would be a day of reckoning for that moment of impetuous anger. Replacing the journal in its drawer, she extinguished her candles and lay back on her pillow, staring up at the bed canopy. How did she feel about the prospect of being punished for it? Was it fair for him to punish her for having feelings when she thought about him with another witch?

She rolled onto her side, feeling the fabric brushing over her nipples, reminding her of her professor—of how he had effortlessly enslaved her by means of her need of what he had to offer. He hadn’t meant to do it—he had only meant to provide training, to prepare her for service to a dominant wizard whom she could call her own, some day. But *this* dominant wizard was the only one she wanted, and she craved every bit of attention she could glean from him, up to and including his displeasure and punishment. How was she to learn if not through instruction? And besides, she relished the spankings she received from him. Yes, she was fully willing to accept whatever he deemed to be appropriated discipline for her moment of uncontrolled temper. She would even confess why she had done it, if he required it of her.

For even though she had been away from him for less than an hour, already she longed to see him again.

She did see him again, at breakfast the next morning. He appeared wan but otherwise well, and under her close watch, he consumed a good sized meal. Although she watched him surreptitiously for the entire time she sat at in the Great Hall, he never once looked her way. Rising to go to her first class, she tossed her hair, resolving not to dwell on his actions.

Just because he didn’t look at her didn’t mean he wasn’t thinking of her, did it?

At lunch, she managed to spend more time reading a book than watching him, which she counted as a victory. By the time Potions class rolled around in the afternoon, only the wild pounding of her heart signified that entering Professor Snape’s dungeon was different from any other class of any other day.

He was at his desk marking scrolls when they entered, and when class began, he scarcely looked up.
‘Carefully read the instructions and brew the potion whose formula is on the chalkboard,’ he said sourly, a wave of his wand causing the chalkboard to fill with his handwriting. ‘You have one hour. Begin.’

Hermione set out her ingredients and chopped and ground efficiently, casting frequent glances to the desk near the front, but her professor did not look up from his marking. Ten minutes before the end of class, he rose from his desk and began to sweep amongst the students, glancing into cauldrons, but he did not come near their table.

‘Thank Merlin for small favours,’ Ron said at the end of the lesson, gouging lumps of potion from the bottom of his cauldron and cramming them into a phial to turn in. ‘I wouldn’t want to hear what the git has to say about this mess.’

Harry scrawled his name on his phial, his potion as least in liquid form, if not the colour of raspberries, as it was supposed to be—as Hermione’s was. ‘Don’t worry, Ron, we’ll still have time for him to insult us when we drop these off.’

Hermione thrust out her hand, her heart beating rather loudly in her ears. ‘Give them here—I’ll turn them in with mine,’ she said, managing an offhand tone.

‘Thanks, Hermione,’ Harry said, slapping his phial into her palm. ‘I owe you one.’

‘Me, too,’ Ron agreed, adding his phial to Harry’s. ‘We’ll see you in the common room.’

Hermione nodded absently to them, dawdling over the disposition of her potions kit until all the other students were gone.

‘You may leave your offering on the desk, Miss Granger,’ her professor’s icy voice informed her.

Hermione jerked her head up, seeing him on his way out the door. ‘Wait!’ she called, hurrying down the aisle, but by the time she reached the doorway, the corridor was empty; he was gone. She stomped to his desk and added her and the boys’ class assignments to the rows of phial holders. Why hadn’t he stayed behind? Didn’t he want to speak to her?

*Obviously not,* the ever-helpful voice in her mind taunted.
Disconsolate, she shouldered her book bag and walked down the corridor towards his office. Should she knock? Perhaps he was ill and needed her assistance …

She hesitated in the corridor for a moment, then turned and trudged up to Gryffindor Tower. If there was one thing she had learned about her professor, it was that he would deal with her if and when he was prepared to do so, and not one moment before.

By Saturday evening, Hermione was sick with anxiety. Her professor had managed to go through three full class days without once glancing her way, much less speaking to her. Morning, noon, and night Hermione clawed her journal open with shaking hands, hoping desperately to find his spiky writing therein, but it did not appear. Why? Why was he doing this? How could he, after the time they had spent together in his rooms—in his bed—kissing and sleeping and making love? He had told her personal things about himself, treated her as if she were his girlfriend—how could he just stop, with no word of explanation?

*Maybe he’s doing it because of those things,* the voice in her mind whispered.

It was certainly a possibility to consider.

After dinner on Saturday night, she bathed carefully, washing her hair and shaving her legs silky smooth. She dried herself and spent a long time drying her hair before twisting it into a utilitarian knot on top of her head. She slathered on delicately scented lotion and pulled on a very soft jumper, matching it with a plain black skirt. She pushed her naked feet into shoes and covered herself with a cloak before making her way to the dungeons, keeping to the least used corridors and stairwells, not wanting to explain to anyone what she was doing in the dungeons on a Saturday night.

As she reached for his office door, it swung forward, and her heart did a little flip-flop. He had expected her—she was welcome. It was so easy, when he went for days ignoring her, to begin to believe that it had all been her imagination …

She hid her cloak beneath the office desk and turned to the study door. Taking a deep breath, she pushed it open and entered the professor’s study, taking the hem of her skirt and tucking it in her
waistband as she waited by the door with her cunt exposed.

He was seated at the table, his head bent over a pile of parchment, his quill scratching steadily. He wore a loden green jumper, and his curtain of hair obscured his face from her. She was content to watch him from the corner of her eye, delighted to be with him in this room, where she usually commanded his undivided attention.

Time ticked by on the clock on the mantel; Hermione heard it chime the quarter-hour, then the half-hour, and it was not until the clock had chimed again that her professor laid his quill aside and turned in his chair to face her.

‘You waited very well,’ he said, the intimacy of his tone to her ears like water to a parched man. ‘I am pleased, Hermione.’ He stood from his chair and crossed to sit on the cobalt blue sofa, placing a cushion upon the floor near his feet. ‘Come,’ he invited her, indicating the cushion. ‘Sit.’

She went forward eagerly, longing to put her arms around him and kiss the sharp angle of his jaw, to smell the spice of his aftershave. She took the place he indicated and sat down, averting her eyes. ‘Thank you, sir,’ she said softly.

They sat together in companionable silence, her shoulder near his knee, until the clock chimed the hour. She had been with him for nearly an hour, and he had yet to speak to her about anything personal or to touch her. Hermione took a deep, steadying breath. As a submissive, it was not her place to demand things of him. If he wished simply for her quiet companionship, it was her place to provide that for him. And it wasn’t as if he were ignoring her; she could feel his eyes upon her.

‘Are you prepared to discuss the pages you ripped from the journal I gave you?’ he asked, his tone grave.

‘Yes, sir,’ she responded, feeling her heart skip a beat. Where had her composure gone? After skipping, her pulse rate doubled, her palms becoming slick with sweat.

‘Perhaps you could enlighten me, Hermione,’ he said conversationally. ‘I gave you explicit instructions which you followed to the letter, just as a good submissive ought—and then you committed a series of erroneous actions: you destroyed the writing assignment you had been given, you defaced the journal I provided for you, and you failed to enter your required daily information for Monday and a large part of Tuesday.’
Knowing it was a mistake even as she did it, Hermione whirled around to face him. ‘But I was with you!’ she cried indignantly. ‘You called me to come to you, and I took care of you when you were too ill to take care of yourself!’

The benign expression he had worn when he had invited her to sit at his feet was gone, replaced by narrowed eyes, flared nostrils, and thin lips pressed into an angry white line. ‘I fail to see what any of this has to do with the subject under discussion,’ he stated icily.

‘But I wasn’t thinking about the journal, was I?’ she pointed out heatedly. ‘I was thinking about looking after you.’

He stared at her stonily. ‘Do you regret your actions?’ he demanded.

She gasped. ‘Of course not!’

‘Is it your contention that extraneous duties take precedence over the assignments you agreed to complete as part of your training?’

‘I—’ Hermione began, but the expression on his face, stern and unyielding, coupled with the implacable tone of his voice finally penetrated her righteous indignation, and she scrambled onto her knees before him, careful not to touch him. ‘No, sir,’ she said, suddenly penitent. ‘I’m sorry.’

Ticking seconds became minutes as she waited before him, on her knees with her eyes averted, apprehension singing in her body. She hadn’t meant to disobey him—she had been filled with nothing but concern for him!—and hadn’t meant to speak disrespectfully, either, but in her defensive reaction, she hadn’t been thinking about him as her Dominant …

When the clock chimed the half-hour, he spoke in quiet, measured tones. ‘Tell me the things for which you will be punished,’ he said.

Hermione bit her lip and raised her face to his. He watched her with merciless eyes, his entire attention focussed on her and her alone. ‘I tore the pages from the journal you gave to me,’ she said, her voice shaking with threatening tears. ‘When I did that, I defaced your gift to me and failed to complete the assignment you had given me.’ She swallowed, trying hard to push past the painful lump in her throat. How had everything gone pear-shaped so quickly? When would she learn to control her impulsiveness? ‘I failed to make note on Monday and on much of Tuesday of what I ate and when I slept and what I studied.’ She lifted her chin a bit looked straight into his eyes before
adding, ‘And I touched my breasts after I left your room Tuesday night, but I didn’t orgasm.’

Taking the opportunity she afforded him by looking into his eyes, he slipped into her mind, and she felt him viewing her memories. When he disengaged from her a moment later, she whimpered at the loss of his presence within her.

‘You have detailed the reasons for your punishment, Hermione, save for one. Would you like one more opportunity to tell me what it is?’

Hermione squirmed under his steady gaze. Hadn’t she confessed to enough? What more did he want from her?

‘I—I can’t think of what it is,’ she whispered.

He nodded once and stood, beginning to unfasten his belt. ‘Remove your clothing,’ he said dispassionately. ‘Go to the table and bend over the edge.’

Hermione stood on trembling legs, shedding her skirt and jumper and going to lean over the table. How she wished the ordeal were over! The separation from him imposed by his displeasure was worse than any spanking he could deliver. She was desperate to recover the connection with him she so longed for. She could endure anything to reach that place again.

As she bent over the table, the familiar sensation of the soft bindings wrapped about her forearms, pulling her forward until her toes barely touched the floor. She was aware of how the wooden table grabbed at her skin, preventing the easy slide of her torso over its surface, and of the cold of the tabletop against her bare flesh. Turning her face to the side, she sought and found the ghostly reflection of her professor in the glass wall. He stopped behind her, the doubled belt hanging at his side.

‘Do you wish to continue your training under my direction, Hermione?’ he asked. ‘If you do not choose to do so, I will release you now and permit you to return to your room.’

‘No!’ she cried, twisting her head to see him over her shoulder. ‘Please, sir, no! I want to continue.’

She couldn’t maintain the pretzel contortion of looking over her shoulder, so she could only see his head nod in the dim glass reflection.
'Do you accept your discipline as justly meted out, Hermione?'

And rather than answering, she began to weep tears of contrition.

‘The last thing for which you are being punished is your disrespect to me in this room, Hermione,’ he said sternly, turning his body to begin her spanking. ‘You will address me as “sir” in this room, or you will not speak at all.’

‘Yes, sir,’ she said, her words distorted by weeping, and her spanking began.

‘Count, Hermione,’ he ordered her, and the blows began to fall, stinging with the force of his arm, true in his aim, side to side, top to bottom, back and forth, never hitting the same spot twice in succession.

Hermione twisted beneath the lashing blows, choking out the numbers, wondering dimly at her own perversion, that receiving a naked lashing from her grim Potions professor—never mind that his stark, angular body had become to her all that was beautiful in the world—thrilled her as no furtive Astronomy Tower trysts had ever done, leaving her quim wet and aching with need.

When they reached twenty blows he stopped, his breathing somewhat laboured. After a moment, he said, ‘You need not count for the remaining spanks, Hermione. Devote your energy to understanding how you have displeased me and how you mean to go on in the future.’

The blows began again, but she was scarcely aware of them; she was terrified by his last words, which sounded very much as if she were in serious danger of losing his favour permanently. Relenting at last, she let go of her resistance and accepted the correction he provided for her, crying in earnest as she felt her defiance dissolve beneath the administration of his discipline, until she felt cleansed within, a limp and empty bowl to be filled as he deemed best.

When he set aside his leather belt, the invisible bonds released her, and she slid to her feet, where she swayed. He wrapped her wordlessly in her emerald green blanket and carried her to the sofa, holding her in his lap as the sobbing slowed and stopped. She curled against him, revelling in the smell of his aftershave and the feel of his arms about her—but he hadn’t got her off. No finger-fucking, no quim-licking—she was an aching, sopping mess between her legs.

After a few moments more, he opened the blanket and looked down at her body, his hand slipping
between her legs to cup and squeeze her mound. Hermione sighed and spread her legs, and he slipped two fingers inside her body as his thumb circled her clitoris.

‘Does it feel good?’ he asked quietly.

‘Yes, sir,’ she responded, slowly humping against his hand.

‘You’re not to climax without permission,’ he said in the same quiet tone, and Hermione nodded.

‘I won’t come without permission,’ she agreed, feeling the fire he created in her body burning through her blood.

‘Are you close to coming?’ he asked, and she opened her eyes to gaze at him eagerly, nodding her head.

He stopped.

Hermione’s hips moved, but he withdrew his hand.

‘Some Dominants,’ he said, his tone even and emotionless, ‘use orgasm denial as a form of training, Hermione.’

Oh, God, no! No! He couldn’t mean to leave her this way!

‘Sir?’ she said piteously, her hands clutching at his jumper.

‘You will have a full week of orgasm denial, Hermione,’ he said, his tone seeming almost robotic.

She took a deep breath. Well, orgasm denial wasn’t so bad, was it? He only let her come when he said so, anyway—that wasn’t anything new.
He surprised her by dipping his fingers again into her quim, plucking at her clitoris until she moaned, thrusting her hips at him. Before, when he had sat down with her after her spanking, there had been no bulge beneath her bum, but there was definitely one present now; that glorious cock she had seen him fist was stirring beneath her arse—how could he talk about orgasm denial when his own cock wanted him to fuck her?

‘Does it feel good?’ he murmured into her ear, sliding one hand up to fondle a nipple, as well.

‘Oh, please, sir,’ she moaned as his hand roamed between her breasts while the other rubbed her clitoris in mind-numbing circles. ‘Please …’

He withdrew his hand from her quim again, wringing a sob from her. ‘Each night, beginning tomorrow, you will masturbate until you are about to orgasm—and you will stop. You will write full reports of your activities in your journal. You are not to skip a night of rubbing that luscious cunt of yours with your hand or with one of your toys—you are to do it every single night, do you understand me?’

‘Yes, sir,’ Hermione whimpered. It was barbaric! What was the point of masturbating if you weren’t allowed to orgasm?

‘At the end of the week, you will return to this room—one week from tonight—and I will perform Legilimency upon you to see if you’ve told me the truth. Don’t even think of trying to lie to me, Hermione.’

She looked up at him, feeling like a child who’s been shown the sweet shop and told she’s not to have even one piece of toffee.

‘If you “accidentally” orgasm even once, it will earn you another week of no climaxing,’ he cautioned her. ‘If, however, I peruse your memories and find out that you’ve successfully completed your assignment, then you will be permitted to orgasm here, with me, as many times as you can manage in our time together.’

His wicked fingers stole into her slit and rubbed her clitoris. ‘Do you understand me? Do you understand all of the instructions I’ve given you? Do you have any questions at all?’

Hermione spread her legs wide and writhed under his fingers, telling herself that as long as he would permit her to have this again, she could endure anything.
‘Yes, sir!’ she gasped. ‘I understand, and I have no questions.’

He removed his hand, from her quim, slowly sucking her flavour from his fingers before securely wrapping her again in her blanket, leaving only her arms free.

‘Do you want to read from Master Maximus’ book until curfew, or would you rather return to your room?’ he asked, rising to his feet.

‘I’d like to read, please, sir,’ she answered, already missing the bulk and heat of him beside her. It was almost certain that reading about Master Maximus and his submissive, t, would make her want to come more than ever, but she refused to give up her evening in his company, no matter how uncomfortable it might be.

And as he returned to the marking he had been doing when she arrived, Hermione curled up and read more about the art of submission.
Chapter 22 - Choices

The next few days were very difficult for Hermione. Knowing that she was not permitted to orgasm was not new; her professor had taken control of her climaxes some time before. No, the difficulty was that she was required to deliberately excite herself and deny herself completion. She had never attempted such a thing before, and she certainly didn’t look forward to it. In many ways, it made her resentful. What was the point of this exercise? Yes, she wanted to please her Dominant—she wanted to be with him, she wanted to submit to him—but this was difficult, and the pay-off was so far away that it was hard to believe she would ever reach it.

In another way, it excited her. His interest in this most personal part of her life was delicious. It meant that he thought of her when she was not with him, that he spent time away from her thinking about her pleasuring herself. How could that not be terribly arousing for him? And then what did he do? Did he touch himself? Did he take his cock out and fist it while he thought of her touching herself? Did he use a lubricant when he did it? Was it an oil or a lotion—or did he spit in his palm to make himself slick? Just thinking about her professor wanking himself to thoughts of her made her ache with desire for him. In some way, he managed to make everything between them sexual, and she was completely wrapped up in the interaction between them.

She thought of little else, these days. She attended her classes, she completed her assignments, she revised according to her schedule, but always, at the back of her mind, was the awareness of Professor Snape. When she sat in her classes, she often daydreamed about him. When she was walking down the castle corridors, she imagined him watching her—she also imagined him watching her when she bathed and when she masturbated … which meant that she frequently masturbated in the bath. It seemed that he wanted her to be essentially a sexual creature, and at the same time, he was restricting her sexual activity more all the time, bringing it—bringing her—more under his control with each passing day.

And in spite of her rebellious moments, she could not have chosen anything she desired more than to belong to Severus Snape, body, mind and soul.
Before you sleep tonight, you will pinch your nipples until they ache, then you will soothe them by rubbing oil into them for two minutes. At the end of that time, you will lift your breasts to your mouth and lick all of the oil from your nipples. Spend no less than three full minutes on this task. When that is done, spread your thighs wide and use the oil to rub your clit. Do not orgasm. When all you want is to come, stop. Suck your fingers clean and write the experience in your journal.

His instructions to her were explicit and exacting. She found it very, very difficult. Only the knowledge that he would invade her mind and review her memories forced her to remove her fingers from her aching quim before climaxing. Her dreams were non-stop erotic scenes from which she awoke in nearly a worse state than she had been when she went to sleep.

On Wednesday, feeling very much as if she would like to kill anyone who dared to speak to her, she was on tenterhooks when she entered her professor’s classroom. She was hanging on to her composure by a very slender thread, and she did not know how she would react to being either ignored or taunted by her Dominant.

She took her place between the boys and busied herself with removing her things from her Potions kit before class began.

The door to the room slammed as Professor Snape entered, robes billowing. He jabbed his wand at the chalkboard and familiar instructions appeared there.

‘Your pathetic attempts at brewing this simple nose-hair remover were more than usually dismal,’ he said, his voice low and dripping with disdain.

Hermione grimaced. The solution had not been a simple one to brew, but how like him to describe it as such.

He continued, ‘I am creditably informed that this potion will appear on your NEWT examination. I would suggest that you actually read the formula before brewing it. You have one hour to turn in a properly brewed potion. Marks today will be either passing or failing. Begin.’

With a scowl, Hermione began organising her ingredients. How tedious to have to brew it again—she had done it properly last week!

‘Miss Granger,’ the silky baritone of her teacher purred from behind her.
Hermione, Harry, and Ron all jumped, as if in a choreographed move.

‘Sir?’ Hermione squeaked, rubbing her suddenly sweaty palms against her skirt.

‘Your attempt at this potion was … adequate,’ he said with a sneer, his black eyes glittering. ‘You may, instead, restock the storeroom shelves.’

Hermione jammed the contents of her Potions kit back in her bag with a show of annoyance. ‘Yes, Professor Snape,’ she said in an obviously insincere tone.

Harry and Ron gave her commiserating looks which she answered with a resigned shrug before flouncing off to the storeroom, a wild cacophony of emotion slamming about in her tummy as she did so. What was he going to do? The last time he had cornered her in here he had pleasured her—was he going to sabotage his own orders?

Sweet Merlin, she hoped so.

Bending to remove Abyssinian Shrivelfigs from a crate, she did not hear her professor as he entered the storeroom and wasn’t aware of his presence until he had closed the door and cast an Imperturbable Charm upon it. Straightening, she allowed the Shrivelfigs to fall from her fingers and found herself backing away from her professor’s aggressive advance, the twist of his lip and glittering of his eyes bringing her heart to a thundering crescendo. He was like a man possessed.

When she felt the shelving at her back, he was upon her in a swirl of black wool, the spice of his aftershave triggering a scent memory of such overwhelming pleasure that all thought of fear left her. Her arms lifted to embrace him, but he grasped her wrists and pulled them over her head, a murmured spell holding them there, suspended.

‘Let’s see how you’re doing on your assignment,’ he said, and he was in her mind, perusing at leisure and in great detail her orgasmless masturbatory adventures.

Hermione could scarcely breathe for the excitement of being held so utterly in his thrall. She was helpless to do aught but re-experience each of her obedient quim-rubbing, no climax experiences, while being acutely aware of her professor’s arousal. His panting breaths, flavoured by the spearmint tea he had doubtless imbibed in the staff room, and the bulge pressed against her midsection told their own tale.
'Oh, well done,' he murmured, watching as she laved her nipples clean of the oil which she next spread over her wide-open quim before rubbing herself to the edge of orgasm.

Watching with him, Hermione was unable to prevent herself from feeling the arousal all over again. Powerless to free her hands, she stood with his body pressed to hers, her breasts and cunt aching with the pure need to be ravished by him.

Then his lips descended to her ear. ‘Do you know how much it excites me when you’re obedient?’ he demanded, the tip of his tongue teasing the shell of her ear.

‘No, sir,’ she sighed, arching her throat, wishing to feel his teeth scrape along her jugular vein.

Then her hands were free, and he was pressing her palm to the iron rod of his erection, even as his other hand slipped up beneath her skirt, rubbing insistently at the gusset of her tights.

Hermione grasped him through his trousers, squeezing gently before stroking his length with the heel of her palm. His fingers pressed against her quim, and even through the thin fabric of her tights and her knickers, she was so tightly wound it felt as if his fingers were teasing her bare quim. She moved desperately against him as he buried his nose in her hair, his teeth at her throat.

‘I could let you come now,’ he said, raising his face to stare into her eyes. ‘I could finger you to orgasm right here and now—but then you’d give up your chance at unlimited orgasms on Saturday night in my study.’ He delved beneath her jumped and pinched her nipple through her bra and blouse. ‘Do you want to come now, Hermione, or do you want to finish your assignment and receive your reward?’

She strained against him, feeling as if her mind had liquefied and slid to her quim, a burning lake of what once had been grey matter. ‘Don’t make me choose,’ she begged, her voice rough with desire.

He kissed her mouth, the taste of him so fraught with testosterone that Hermione sucked at his lips and his tongue, wanting to devour him. His tongue teased hers, sliding against it, and retreated, enticing her into his mouth, where he sucked and teased her tongue as if it were her clitoris. When his lips released hers, she sagged against him with a whimper.

‘Sometimes, Hermione,’ he said, ‘giving me your choice is the same as yielding your will to me. There are times when I will wish to choose for you, but this is not one of those times.’ He cupped her molten quim and gave it a squeeze, using his free hand to stroke her hair from her face.
‘Choose,’ he commanded gently.

Dear God how she needed to come! But she felt this was a test of some sort, and she desperately wanted to surprise him—to please him—with her answer.

‘I—I’ll wait, sir,’ she said, trembling in his arms.

The ragged breath he drew told her more than any words he could have spoken. He released his hold on her mound, smoothing her skirt down and straightening her jumper as he pulled her away from the shelves. The tips of his fingers stroked her cheek with infinite tenderness, and he brushed a kiss across her lips before releasing her and stepping back.

‘You’re magnificent, Hermione,’ he said, looking directly into her eyes, his expression sober. ‘Very few submissives as new to their training as you are could have chosen so wisely.’

Hermione felt herself swell with pride and pleasure—she had chosen correctly! It was what he had wanted to hear, even if not what he had expected. He had given her an out, but she had declined it. She was jubilant. She swayed toward him, hands outstretched, pure joy bubbling inside of her.

Professor Snape’s face changed as he looked at her, as if a curtain had been pulled between them. He swallowed and took another step away from her. ‘Your training is progressing very quickly,’ he said quietly. ‘You should be very pleased with yourself. I feel quite sure that you will be prepared to offer your submission to the Master of your choice when you leave school. I will give you very good references.’

Hermione felt her heart plummet. What was he babbling about? She didn’t want to hear about something so distant—she wanted to receive his tender caresses—she wanted to think about the reward to come in three days’ time. She couldn’t—wouldn’t! —think about some unknown Dominant …

Professor Snape turned from her and moved to the door. ‘Please use the remainder of class time to stock the shelves,’ he said and slipped out the door.

Sexual arousal doused by the cold dash of reality delivered by her professor, Hermione attacked the task of putting away the potions ingredients as her mind gnawed away at her dilemma: How was she going to convince Severus Snape that she, Hermione Granger, was the submissive he had always wanted to have for his very own?
On Saturday night, Hermione knelt in a perfect submissive’s pose for her Dominant, her naked body rosy with excitement. The fire in the hearth roared, dispelling the chill of the December night.

‘Look at me, Hermione,’ Professor Snape said, his voice warm and inviting.

Hermione raised her eyes to his.

‘I’m going to examine your memories now,’ he told her. ‘Did you follow your instructions? Did you deny yourself orgasm all week, as I asked you to?’

Hermione took in his easy, relaxed posture upon the cobalt blue sofa. He wore the midnight blue jumper over black trousers, his raven’s wing black hair hanging loose upon his shoulders, still slightly damp from the shower. She wanted him with an ache which burned in her quim and emanated in waves throughout her entire body. ‘Yes, sir,’ she answered, offering herself for his examination.

He sat forward and placed his hand beneath her hair, at the nape of her neck, then he slipped into her mind. Together they viewed Hermione’s memory of their encounter in the Potions storeroom, followed by her careful performance of each day’s detailed instructions from him. Seeing it all again, knowing he was watching with her, was almost unbearably erotic for her. Then he released her mind, and before she could protest his sudden absence, he pressed a kiss to her mouth.

‘Good girl,’ he murmured, then sat back again, his dark eyes upon her face. ‘Do you trust me, Hermione?’ he asked.

‘Yes, sir,’ she answered without thought. It was a true answer. She had followed him so deeply into this—she would have followed him into fire.

His eyes glittered oddly as he produced the black silk scarf with which he had blindfolded her before. ‘May I cover your eyes?’ he asked. ‘Will you yield your will to me for the evening and allow me to do with you as I will?’

‘Oh, yes,’ she said, swaying towards him, her heart beating an uneven tattoo in her ears.

He smiled that rare, heart-rending smile that never failed to thrill her to her toes. ‘Excellent,’ he said. ‘Turn and sit between my knees, for now—I wish to brush your hair.’

Hermione subsided between his long legs with a sigh of contentment, closing her eyes and feeling her heartbeat slowing and evening with every stroke of her silver-backed hairbrush down her long, bushy mane. ‘I would like for you to make a conscious effort to relinquish responsibility for yourself this evening,’ Professor Snape said, his hand smoothing her thick hair in the wake of the hairbrush, soothing her to compliancy beneath the twin persuasions of his touch and his velvet voice. ‘It is one of the privileges of the Dominant to take responsibility for the decisions of the submissive—to relieve you of the necessity of deciding anything. For the space of this evening, give yourself permission to do nothing but feel.’ The motion of the hairbrush paused, and Hermione was aware of the forward
shift of his body, so that his lips were at her ear. ‘Will you try?’ he murmured.

‘I will, sir,’ she promised, leaning back into the vee of his thighs, turning her head slightly, pressing her cheek against his.

‘Good girl,’ he said, kissing the corner of her mouth before leaning back and resuming the brushing of her hair.

Hermione sighed again and subsided with one cheek leaning on his knee, allowing her will to seep from her more fully with each stroke of the brush through her hair.

‘There you go—now we’ll just tidy it out of the way.’ The long-fingered hands relinquished the hairbrush and gathered her hair at her nape, twisting it up and magically securing it at the back of her head. ‘Now, the blindfold,’ he continued, and the whisper of silk pressed over her eyes.

Hermione obediently closed them as deft fingers tied the blindfold in place, then warm lips pressed a kiss to her nape. ‘You are very beautiful when you yield your will to me, Hermione,’ he said, and she quivered with full-bore, helpless love for him.

Love … oh sweet Circe, she loved him.

She was well and truly lost.

And the epiphany of her love flowed seamlessly into the evening of exquisite pleasure, as her professor led her from one mind-dissolving orgasmic incident to the next.

He began simply, drawing her up from the floor onto his lap. ‘Your obedience pleases me more than I can say,’ he murmured into her hair, his fingers gently squeezing the globes of her breasts before beginning to apply pressure to her nipples. ‘For tonight, little one, I would like for you to confine your utterances to sounds of pain or pleasure or words of passion. Allow yourself to be an instrument of sexual sensation, and I will seek to play your body and your mind to the benefit of us both.’

And before she could respond, his lips claimed hers, his tongue delving into the depths of her mouth, silencing her most effectively. Hermione moaned to have his tongue dominating hers again, desperate for the orgasm she had been denied for so many days. He kissed her as he caressed her breasts, then his hand was between her legs, his fingers sliding in and out of her body as his tongue mimicked the action with her mouth. Hermione clung to him, her arms about his neck, and sucked hard on his tongue as her orgasm exploded through her.

She rode the euphoria in the safe haven of his arms, thrumming with contentment, until he murmured again into her ear.

‘Stand for me, Hermione,’ he commanded, and she did so instantly. He stood and took her hand, leading her across the floor. She knew she was farther from the fireplace, because the air was cooler, but not uncomfortably so.

He took her hands, one by one, and affixed broad cuffs to her wrists. The cuffs smelled of leather, but were soft inside, against her skin, as if lined with the softest down.

‘Up they go,’ her professor commented, and her arms were pulled above her head, as if by ropes attached to the cuffs. When her arms were extended above her head, the pulling stopped. Curious, she tugged and found that something did, indeed, secure her wrists together. She wondered if it would be difficult to keep her arms up for a long time—perhaps it would be a test of endurance for her, to see if she would complain. Resolving to bear any discomfort, Hermione waited to see what next would happen.
‘I know you enjoy your spankings, little one,’ her professor’s voice stated, from some distance behind her. ‘We’re going to discover if you will enjoy a flogging, as well.’

Forgetting the enjoinder to remain silent, Hermione gasped, ‘Wait!’

An instant later, his breath was upon her cheek. ‘It’s hard to remember not to speak, isn’t it?’ he murmured, cupping her cheek. ‘Never mind—I can help you with that.’

Hermione bit her lip. She had already disobeyed, but he didn’t seem angry. It was difficult to remember to be quiet, that was quite true—and what did he mean by flogging? Wasn’t that something that happened to miscreant sailors in the Napoleonic wars? She shivered, feeling gooseflesh pebble her skin.

A round, smooth object pressed against her mouth. ‘Open, little one,’ he purred, and Hermione opened her mouth, surprised and not a little panicked when what felt to be a rubber ball was thrust between her teeth. She made a sound of distress but her professor continued, fastening something at the back of her head, and she found that she was unable to expel the ball from her mouth—he had gagged her with it.

Then his lips were on her throat, his hands stroking soothingly along her flanks. ‘So beautiful,’ he murmured. ‘Don’t be afraid, little one. You may make all the noise you wish, now, and you will not be guilty of disobedience—the gag will prevent you from speaking. If you find any of my attentions somewhat painful, you may bite into the rubber of the ball—you will do it no harm.’

He moved away from her, and Hermione stood in an open space in his study, naked save for the leather cuffs which bound her hands, gagged and blindfolded, awaiting his ‘attentions’. A sane person, she thought with a wild giggle which was smothered by the ball gag, would be out of her mind with fear, but not Hermione Granger: In spite of her very recent climax, her quim already ached in anticipation of what was next to come.

Sightless, her sense of hearing was doing double duty, and she heard the very slight rustle of movement as he approached her again. Tensing, she was surprised when what felt like a thousand rubbery strings flopped harmlessly onto her shoulder and were stroked from one shoulder to the other, their knotted tips dragging slightly as the strings were drawn over one furled nipple.

‘This is your flogger, little one,’ he informed her. ‘I am going to whip you with it—do I have your consent? A simple nod or shake of your head will suffice.’

Hermione found herself twisting toward his voice, even as he withdrew the flogger strands from her body. How would it feel? Would it be like countless belts striking her flesh, or something different? Scarcely realising she had done so, she nodded her head in acquiescence.

‘What a good submissive you are,’ he praised her silkily. ‘Now, listen to me carefully, Hermione. It’s important for you to stand still; I will strike your bottom with different force than your back. If you’re unable to stand still I will be forced to shackle your legs. Nod if you understand me.’

She nodded once, eager to discover the sensation of the rubbery cords upon her skin.

‘We will begin very lightly, little one—this flogging is for pleasure only.’

The first landing of the knotted rubber strands upon her bottom stung, yet Hermione found that she loved the sensation. The professor lashed the thin cords against her backside in slow, measured blows, and Hermione purred in her throat, scarcely moving beneath the slowly increasing speed of the flogging—save to sway, as if to music, losing herself completely in the bliss of the rubber strands.
When he stopped, she whimpered her protest, and he was right beside her, his breathing slightly ragged, as if from exertion—or sexual excitement. ‘You like that, don’t you?’ he asked, and she nodded, humming and straining towards him, but he side-stepped her. ‘Would you like to see how it feels on your belly and your breasts?’ he purred.

Good God, of course she wanted that—she wanted it directly on her quim—would he think of that?

She nodded emphatically, and he chuckled. ‘This is your night of rewards, little one—your wish is my pleasure to provide.’

She was conscious of him moving around her, and she arched her back, offering her naked breasts to him. Her heightened hearing was so acute, she could not fail to detect his gasp at her action, and she wondered if perhaps her blatant desire was responsible for the exquisite stinging blow which then landed directly upon her nipple. The strands slapped the tender flesh of her breast even as their knotted ends impacted her crinkled areola, wringing a groan of sheer animal pleasure from her and sending desire straight to her slick cunt.

His answering grunt sent a thrill of power coursing through her, flavouring the next several strikes of the flogger upon her breasts and belly with pure intoxication—he was as overwrought from the act of flogging her bound, naked body as she was.

Dear Merlin, she loved him.

She had not yet realised he had stopped flogging her before he was on her, hands at her hips, lifting her as if she were weightless. Her legs wrapped automatically about his bum, even as he drove his clothed erection against her wetness, sending a happy shock to her womb—fuck me! her mind screamed—and then her arms were released. Shifting her up and rather inelegantly over his shoulder, he lurched to a spot before the hearth, where they tumbled together, his strong arms keeping her safe. She was sprawled over him, his hands massaging her tingling arms. ‘We must always be careful not to keep your arms in that position for too long,’ he murmured as he rubbed.

Hermione was happy for the attention to her protesting arm muscles, but she was far more aware of her needy quim and the erection beneath her bum. Even as she permitted him to attend to her aching arms, she undulated on his erection, desperately seeking more contact.

Next his hands were at the back of her head, and the ball gag was loose, then gone. He shifted, a hand delving into his trousers pocket beneath her bottom, and he used his handkerchief to tenderly dry her face of the saliva which had been present on the rubber ball of the gag. ‘My God but you’re good,’ he said to her, his voice oddly thick and strained. ‘Never a moment of fear—you are the epitome of the best traits of your House, my pet.’ Then he was kissing her, kissing her mouth as if he were communicating information for which there were no words.

My pet ... pet ... pet ...

In a world now boiled down to nothing but his voice—My pet—and his touch, Hermione responded to him with every emotion at her command. Her arms, still wearing the leather cuffs with which he had bound her, wrapped about his neck; she shimmied against his chest, brushing her nipples across the softness of his jumper, and she spread her legs wide, opening her dripping quim and rubbing her bottom against his hard cock, hoping to gain some measure of relief for her desperate need of him.

With a growl, he pushed her from his lap, and for a moment, Hermione flailed, bereft of him. But before she could begin to wonder if she had somehow offended him, he shifted himself, as well, and he was on top of her, the wool of his trousers scratchy between her open thighs. He thrust against her, the glorious weight of his body holding her pinned to the hearthrug, and she gasped her
approval, grinding her hips against him. His mouth was everywhere, raining bruising kisses down her throat, suckling and nipping at her breasts, then invading her mouth with his demanding tongue, even as he teased her cunt with his cock, the tip of it clearly delineated even though the fabric of his trousers as it rasped roughly over her clitoris.

‘Please,’ she begged, arching up to meet the thrust of his hips.

‘Quiet, little slut,’ he snarled, his tone hot and jagged. ‘You’ll take what I give you and beg for more.’

And dear God but he was right—she certainly would. It was as if he had unleashed his lust, and the sheer power of it flattened her. She grasped at him, exulting in her helplessness against his superior weight and strength, and she writhed beneath his thrusting, still clothed cock until she came, screaming, shattering beneath the onslaught of his merciless aggression. She was deprived of the sight of his face when he climaxed, but she felt the final jerk of his hips and heard the guttural cry that accompanied his ejaculation, and she clutched him tightly to her, proud of her ability to bring him to this state.

He slipped to one side of her, keeping her close against his side, and she realised he had placed a cushioning charm upon the hearthrug to more comfortably accommodate them. She turned on her side, and she felt his hand at the back of her head; after a moment, the satin of the blindfold fell against her cheek, but the light from the fire was too bright for her. She closed her eyes and nuzzled closer to his face.

‘Merlin’s ghost, girl, you’ll be the death of me,’ he grumbled, the tenderness of his hand upon her back belying his complaining words.

‘Hmm,’ she replied, mindful of his restriction on her speech, quite content to cuddle with him for eternity.

‘That was my first time to come since I jerked off for you in my bed,’ he murmured.

Amazed, Hermione raised her head, staring at him, hoping more detail would be forthcoming.

‘I would never ask something of you I would not do, myself,’ he said seriously, brushing a tendril of loose hair from her cheek. ‘It was very difficult—particularly when I read your journal accounts of your activities—and ten times harder, so to speak, after I had looked into your mind, that day in the Potions storeroom.’

Hermione listened to him in astonishment, reflecting that even had she been permitted to speak, she would not have been able to utter a syllable. His tone was confiding—he was sharing with her quite openly—and her newfound love for him burgeoned in her heart, making it difficult for her to breathe. Quite against her will, tears filled her eyes.

The first drop fell on his cheek, drawing his drowsy eyes back to her face.

‘Here, now—what’s this?’

He wiped a tear from her face, sucking the saltiness from the pad of his thumb. Unaccountably, Hermione was aroused by this act, and her recently sated libido flickered low in her womb. Moving over him, she kissed his mouth, and he permitted her to do so, lying upon his back on the floor before the fire with Hermione hovering over him, devouring his mouth as if it were the finest of Honeydukes sweets. Time ticked by as the fire burned lower, and soon their relative positions were reversed, his slow, tongue-fucking, drugging kisses filling her entire body with languorous, slick-cunt desire. In a rather desultory fashion, he began to finger her quim, and Hermione moaned into his
‘Who’s a needy little slut?’ he purred, watching her face. ‘Who needs my fingers in her cunt every second of every day?’

‘Me,’ she gasped, spreading her legs wider still, receiving an additional finger up her cunt for her trouble. Groaning her appreciation, she moved against his hand.

He lowered his head and fastened his lips around her nipple, sucking. She buried her fingers in his hair, tugging, and he sucked harder, drawing another groan from her. The he released her nipple and his face was over hers again, his expression intent.

‘Whose slut are you, little one?’ he demanded.

‘Yours!’ she gasped, then cried out when he removed his fingers from her quim.

‘Fucking right you are,’ he growled, shifting to a sitting position. ‘You’re my little slut, and you’re going to receive your reward. You may have as much of this as you can bear before your curfew.’

Then he lifted her leg and ducked beneath it, burying his nose in the damp curls between her thighs. ‘Just say “when”,’ he instructed before he began to eat her out. With admirable single-mindedness, he slipped two fingers inside, angling for her sweet spot, and began to suck her clitoris, playing the instrument of her body like a master.

*My Master*, Hermione thought. And giving her uninhibited response in such a way as to earn her repeated encouraging praise from her professor, Hermione managed to say ‘when’ four more times before curfew.
Hermione blinked once and set down her goblet of pumpkin juice. ‘I’m sorry, Anthony; I was thinking about … something else.’ She flashed him a brief smile and was a bit surprised when he blushed and smiled back. ‘What were you saying?’

It was dinner time in the Great Hall, which just that day had been decorated for Christmas by the staff—well, by some of the staff. Certainly, Professor Snape had not participated. Hermione sat over her leisurely dinner with her usual companions and had been surprised when Anthony Goldstein spoke to her. Now, Anthony shuffled his feet nervously, and far down the row, at the head table, Hermione was aware of a figure in black watching her like a hawk.

‘Would you come to the Yule Ball with me?’ Anthony said, obviously nervous.

Hermione could not miss the snort of amusement from Harry, quickly covered by a cough. She directed quelling glares at him and at Ron, who was sitting with his fist pressed to his lips, as if he had a cough, as well. Then she smiled up at Anthony, playing for time.

‘Aren’t you sweet to think of me!’ she said ingenuously, darting a sidelong look up at the head table. Although his head was dipped forward, with the curtains of his long black hair obscuring his face from the other teachers, Hermione clearly saw that her Potions professor was watching her interaction with Anthony Goldstein with burning eyes.

She made her decision all in a rush.

‘I’d love to go to the Yule Ball with you!’ she said with a brilliant smile at him. ‘Shall I meet you in the entrance hall on Friday night at a quarter to?’

Anthony’s relief was almost palpable. ‘Yes!’ he said, rather pathetically grateful. ‘I’ll see you then!’

The Ravenclaw prefect hurried away, and Harry and Ron dissolved into hilarity. Hermione pinned them with a withering glare.

‘Are you absolutely certain that you want to open yourselves up to my commentary on your pathetic loves lives?’ she demanded tartly.

Abruptly, Ron stopped laughing and rose from the table, muttering something about Hermione’s inability to take a joke. ‘Coming, Harry?’ he asked over his shoulder.

‘In a minute,’ Harry answered, turning suddenly sober green eyes on Hermione. ‘Ginny told me you’re not coming with us to the Burrow for Christmas hols,’ he said.

Hermione averted her eyes, developing renewed interest in the remains of her apple pie. ‘That’s
‘I wish you’d change your mind,’ Harry told her. ‘It won’t be the same without you.’

Hermione snorted. ‘It will be much better,’ she said. ‘You and Ron can goof off without me there to tell you to study, and I can study without you and Ron pestering me to goof off.’ She quirked half a smile at Harry and touched the back of his hand. ‘We’ll all be happier this way, Harry. I really need to step up my revision efforts—our NEWTs are almost here.’

Harry’s hand turned beneath hers and clasped it warmly. ‘I’d stay with you, if you wanted,’ he said quietly, and Hermione knew he was sincere.

Squeezing his hand, she said, ‘I know you would—you’re the best of good friends. But the Headmaster has made arrangements for your protection at the Burrow, and besides, I really do want to study. I would be very poor company for you.’

Harry gave her a rueful smile, which she returned, and they sat together for a peaceful moment.

‘How touching,’ a snide voice said, and the two students looked up defiantly into the sneering face of Professor Snape, their hands still clasped. ‘I do hate to interfere in your love life, Potter, but I require a word with Miss Granger.’

Hermione sought to pull her hand away from Harry’s, a sudden flip-flop of her heart melting her defiance into desire to be alone with Professor Snape, but Harry refused to release her, his expression pugnacious as he scowled at their teacher.

‘In case you haven’t noticed, it’s Sunday night,’ Harry snapped.

Professor Snape’s lips thinned. ‘Congratulations, Potter. I had despaired that Hogwarts would ever teach you anything, but I see you have mastered the days of the week. Our job is clearly done.’

Hermione gently pulled her hand from Harry’s and turned her shoulder to their teacher, speaking to Harry alone. ‘It’s all right,’ she told him. ‘I’ll see you in the common room.’

Harry opened his mouth to retort, but Hermione’s expression was discouraging enough to silence him. He nodded once to Hermione and headed for the entrance hall, giving Snape a wide berth.

Hermione stood and followed Professor Snape to a spot near the doorway, away from the student tables. ‘Shall I come to your office?’ she inquired softly.

Her professor frowned. ‘There’s no need for that,’ he said shortly. ‘What are you playing at with Goldstein?’

Feeling as if she had been slapped in the face, Hermione gasped indignantly. ‘I’m not playing at anything!’

His eyes narrowed dangerously. ‘If you have forgotten how shamelessly you encouraged Goldstein, it is my duty to remind you,’ he snapped impatiently. ‘Have I overlooked a budding romance between you and a fellow student? Or is this the first time he’s approached you since attempting to grope you on the road from Hogsmeade?’

Hermione’s eyes flashed angrily. How dared he to upbraid her about Anthony when he was carrying
on with that cow of a shop girl? ‘If you want to discuss it, Professor, I’ll be happy to meet you in your office later this evening,’ she said formally.

With a derisive curl of his lip, he said, ‘I have an appointment out of the castle this evening. I have no time to waste on such a discussion.’

Hermione was pierced, and she felt a prickle of tears, but she was damned if she would display hurt feelings over his rendezvous with another woman. ‘I apologize for wasting your time, sir,’ she said, and without another word, she turned and walked away from him, climbing up the innumerable flights of stairs to Gryffindor Tower without glancing once behind her.

It was one of the most difficult things she had ever done, but Hermione did not sit at her window that night, watching for the man she loved to leave the castle for his meeting with the town girl he was fucking. Instead, she sat all evening in the common room, doing homework and helping the boys with theirs. When her mind wandered to her professor, she forced herself to concentrate again on her revision. When she found herself doodling his initials in the margin of her parchment, she determinedly scratched over it and disciplined herself to continue writing Professor McGonagall’s essay on the ten most common mistakes in human Transfiguration.

At eleven o’clock, she packed up her things and retired to her room, trying desperately not to imagine what her professor was getting up to at that very moment with Taffy Smith. With a heavy heart, she removed her journal from her drawer and sat down to record her meals and what she had studied. She had already decided she would not request to orgasm tonight—she wouldn’t give him the satisfaction of having the opportunity to tell her ‘no’.

Holding the green leather bound volume in her lap, she gazed into space. Why had he approached her about Anthony? He was usually very careful to ignore her in public. She had wanted to make him jealous, but his only response had been to reprimand her and leave her to be with his town slut.

Stop it, she scolded herself. *Think about the good things he says and does, not the things you don’t like. Think about last night.*

A frisson of excitement shimmered over her as she recalled lying upon the hearthrug in the professor’s study, staring down the length of her torso to the sight of his black hair falling forward onto her naked thighs, his face moving rhythmically in her quim, coaxing her inexorably to another orgasm …

Her womb ached with sudden, powerful desire, and she wrapped an arm about her abdomen, curling inward, as if to protect herself from attack. Dear Merlin but she wanted him, no one except him, yet she was not necessary to his happiness. He could go off to be with someone else without a second thought. How was that fair?

Falling back onto her pillow, she opened her journal and flipped to the next blank page, ready to write the required details of her day—but the last page bore his spiky script.

*Here is your assignment, if you choose to accept it.*

*You have permission to orgasm twice tonight. You may finger yourself, fuck yourself with one of your toys, or direct the bath spray onto your clitoris to achieve orgasm. You may not do so by*
fucking one of your little friends.

Anger flared in her. He had been in her mind—he knew bloody well she wasn’t going to fuck one of her friends! Why did he say such things?

As she glared at it, further writing appeared on the page of the journal.

The only other requirement for your permitted orgasms is that you must fantasize about fucking Anthony Goldstein as you bring yourself off. If you do not imagine Goldstein as you masturbate, you may not orgasm. I will be examining your memories to determine if you have followed my instructions.

When you have come for the second time, you are to write a detailed account of each fantasy and each orgasm. If you choose not to masturbate, you will write one thousand words to explain your decision.

‘Damn you to hell!’ Hermione cried, hurling the book away from her, hearing it hit the wall even as she pushed herself to her feet again. The slickness which had developed between her legs as she reminisced about her many orgasms of the night before mocked her now—she couldn’t masturbate to fantasies of Anthony Goldstein! She was constitutionally incapable of it!

She stopped before her mirror, staring unseeing at her reflection. She hadn’t got herself off to thoughts about anyone but Severus Snape since the night he had challenged her in the kitchen at Grimmauld Place—well over three months before! And now, feeling about him as she did, she could no more think of someone else while she pleasured herself than she could fling open the window and fly without a broomstick. It was impossible. He was bloody fucking impossible!

He knows you can’t do it, the voice in her mind whispered.

What?

Moving from the mirror, Hermione wandered to the window and stared out at the star strewn sky. Had he given her the ridiculous, impossible assignment to illustrate her inability to think of a man other than him in a sexual way?

Her chin rose at the very notion.

She wanted him—she wanted him desperately—but she was not about to let him think that she was his for the taking, while he was unavailable to her. If she couldn’t actually be hard to get, she could certainly play hard to get. She could write him one thousand words about why she wasn’t going to wank to thoughts of poor Anthony Goldstein—then she could put all her energies into making it appear that she couldn’t be happier than to be a girl preparing for the Yule Ball. She would find the perfect dress to drive her Dominant insane with desire for her, then fix her hair and do her make-up … If Severus Snape truly found her beautiful and desirable, as he had said he did, she would make herself particularly beautiful to go on a date with another male.

And he could see how it felt.

She was a submissive, but she was not a doormat. She was fighting for her happiness, and she was taking no prisoners.
Hermione did not dawdle; she had no time to waste. The Yule Ball was all but upon them. Choosing last year’s dress robes from her wardrobe, she trekked down the hall to the room shared by Parvati Patil and Lavender Brown.

‘Of course we’ll help you!’ Lavender said, pleased to be consulted for her expertise.

Parvati appeared behind Lavender and reached past her to grab Hermione’s hand. ‘I have a stack of fashion magazines we can look through, and Lavender is the best in all of Gryffindor at Transfiguring clothes!’

Hermione allowed herself to be pulled into the other girls’ room, seeing the familiar sprawl of their very girly possessions strewn about the space—their clutter was one reason why she had been happy to have a room to herself for this last year at school.

‘And if you like,’ Lavender said tentatively, apparently remembering how her offers had been rebuffed in the past, ‘we can help you plan out your hair and make-up …’

Hermione turned a grateful smile on her classmate. ‘Could you?’ she said plaintively, hiding her inner glee—she was getting exactly what she needed to arm herself for making her professor eat his heart out on the evening of the Yule Ball.

On Monday night, Professor Snape again left notes in her journal, offering to allow her to orgasm, providing she did it to fantasies of poor Anthony. If she declined his offer, her alternative was to write one thousand words on why, as she had stated in her previous night’s essay, she would prefer to fantasise about her Dominant than her Yule Ball date.

Hermione tackled her task with grim relish. Dipping her quill in a bottle of ink, she set about to arouse her professor with her vivid explanation of why she preferred to fantasise about him.

On Tuesday night, the identical offer was forthcoming; this time, the alternative was to compare and contrast her feelings regarding fantasising about Anthony Goldstein versus fantasising about Professor Snape—only this time, he doubled the word count.

Hermione stared at the assignment. Really? Did he really need three nights in a row of reassurance that he was the focus of her sexual attraction? Or was he trying to make a not-so-subtle point with her?
She sat at the desk, fanning the feather of her quill gently back and forth across her chin, contemplating their relative positions. Could it be that her professor was finally in a position of want more acute than her own? No, that didn’t seem right—she wanted him every bit as much today as she had done on the preceding days. But could it be that he was finally experiencing feelings of insecurity about the disposition of her affection?

She bit her lip and reasoned through it. Perhaps it was a good thing for her professor to experience even a small part of the agony she experienced every time he left the castle to be with Taffy Smith. Maybe it would make him feel more kindly towards her when she expressed distress over his association with the other witch. And maybe—just maybe—it would alert him to his feelings for her, Hermione. She was sure he had feelings for her—hadn’t he made her admit to belonging to him? Hadn’t he treated her with a tenderness and reverence which bespoke far greater consideration than that of a Dominant for a mere trainee?

Surely she couldn’t be wrong about this, the most important thing in her life: She loved Severus Snape and wanted to lay her submission at his feet; she wanted to be his one and only submissive.

With her resolve clarified, Hermione began to write her two thousand word essay, trying not to imagine her professor reading her heated words and taking himself in hand, gaining a relief he was refusing her by his impossible requirements for her masturbation assignments.

In Potions class on Wednesday afternoon, Hermione nervously awaited some reaction from her professor. She ached for him, denied even the warmth of his benevolent oversight, it seemed, by his taunting suggestion that she fantasise about Anthony Goldstein while getting herself off. She couldn’t prove it, but it felt as if he were punishing her for accepting an invitation to go to the ball. What did he want her to do? Stay in her room all night while all of her friends were at the party? Go alone and sit about the Great Hall without partners while everyone else danced—and while he, no doubt, looked on from across the room, relishing her solitude?

Her chin rose at the very thought.

The slam of the classroom door heralded his entrance, and Hermione could not prevent herself from immediately seeking the sight of him, her heart rate seemed to double. Professor Snape swept to the chalkboard, jabbing his wand at it and producing the day’s assignment in his handwriting—spiky script which Hermione had come to associate with frank sexual enticement and instruction rather than Potions assignments.

‘You will complete your assignment today in silence,’ the professor snarled at the class. ‘There will be no chatter. It is time for you to brew your potions based on your own skill, meagre though it might be.’

Not breathing, Hermione waited for the black eyes to come to rest on her face, but it did not happen. The professor turned his back on the class and stalked to his desk, seating himself and taking up his marking quill without another word. Disconsolate, Hermione began to assemble the ingredients needed for the lesson.

‘Granger.’

Hermione’s head jerked up, her heart in her throat. The rest of the class looked up as well, to find
Professor Snape glaring at Hermione from the front of the room.

‘You may spend the class period restocking and tidying the storeroom.’ With an arrogant sneer, the professor returned to his marking.

‘Lazy git should keep his own storeroom tidy,’ Ron muttered indignantly, glaring daggers at their teacher.

‘Never mind,’ Hermione whispered, hastily stuffing her belongings away in her bag. She wiped her inexplicably sweaty hands surreptitiously down her skirt and hurried to the storeroom, her eyes on the stone floor, her heart racing in anticipation.

Entering the storeroom, she lit the gas lamp and stared in disgust at the barrel of newt intestines, which was the only potions ingredient yet to be shelved. Damn! Did he really mean for her to put the revolting things in a jar? Or was he going to come into the cupboard with her and …

She shifted from one foot to the other, remembering the last time she’d been in the storeroom with her professor, his breath short with sexual arousal as he pressed her hand to his impressive erection, showing her how her obedience excited him. Her quim throbbed with want at the mere memory, and she waited for him with senses heightened to the boiling point.

And waited.

When five minutes had passed, by her watch, it occurred to her with a sick thump of disappointment that he actually meant for her to clear away the mess of the newt intestines. Well, she wasn’t going to do it without her gloves. Stealthily, she crept to the door of the storeroom and slipped into the classroom again, hoping to get past her teacher without his notice. His head was bent over the stack of essays on his desk, and he corrected them with broad strokes of red ink upon the parchment, a sneer of derision upon his face. Feeling more let down than ever, Hermione inched around his desk, only to be stopped short by his voice, pitched for her ears alone.

‘Where do you think you’re going?’

Hermione swallowed audibly. ‘I didn’t think to bring my gloves—’

He cut across her. ‘If I had meant for you to wear gloves, I would have told you to bring them.’

Hermione felt her face flush with humiliation. Why wouldn’t he look at her? Why was he being so cold and distant and unkind? ‘But—’ she began unhappily, and he interrupted her again.

‘Either do your assignment or get out and take a zero for the day,’ he snarled, never slowing in his red ink defacement of the parchment before him.

Turning from him wordlessly, Hermione walked to the table she shared with Harry and Ron, feeling empty inside. It wasn’t that she had any objection to completing the task he had set for her, but that she could not bear to remain one more moment in his presence when all he demonstrated was angry indifference. It hurt too much.

‘Finished already?’ Harry whispered out of the side of his mouth. ‘Good job.’

Hermione didn’t answer him; she simply slung her bag over her shoulder and left the room, a mass of confusion raging in her tummy.
The spiky handwriting appeared in her journal again that night, and Hermione actually shed tears over it. She had been ill with apprehension that she had offended her Dominant so grievously that he meant to stop his association with her. The whole notion had made her so sad that she had been unable to go down to dinner in the Great Hall, instead lying listlessly upon her bed with the green leather book open before her, all her hopes rather fatuously fixed on the appearance of Professor Snape’s instructions for the night.

*Your masturbation assignment remains the same,* he wrote. *If you choose not to accept the assignment, an alternative is to write two thousand words on your current state of mind, your thoughts on how you came to feel as you do, and how this relates to your submission to your Dominant.*

Hermione didn’t hesitate; she sat up and reached for her quill, a tiny spark of hope burning within her. He wouldn’t ask after her if he didn’t care, would he? He wouldn’t want to hear yet more of her devotion to him if he was finished with her, would he?

She dipped her quill in the inkstand, her brow furrowed. Was it possible that his coldness and distance were a product of insecurity or hurt, rather than the desire to be cruel?

The traitorous voice in her mind shouted, *Get a grip! He’s just a man!* But Hermione could barely hear that voice of reason above the clamour in her body for the touch of her Dominant.

Gripping her lower lip between her teeth, she began to write.

She slept surprisingly well that night, after writing her two thousand word assignment for Professor Snape, and she went about her day cheerfully. Tomorrow was the Yule Ball, and the day after that was Saturday, when she would be alone with her professor. She would do all she could to make him want her between now and then. She had the best part of three weeks in the castle with most of the students gone for Christmas hols—time she could spend in the company of a certain devastatingly attractive wizard, if he proved willing.

She looked for him at meals, hoping for some sign from him—just a glance would do, really—but he came late to meals and left early, studiously avoiding her eye at all times. Once, she thought she had caught him looking at her, but he averted his gaze so quickly she couldn’t be sure. The day before, this behaviour might have upset or saddened her, but today, she was simply determined to persevere through the next two days to Saturday, when she would be alone with him in his study, naked and kneeling, free of the need to think or decide anything except whether or not she would yield her will to him.

That night before bedtime, she opened her journal to record her food and studying for the day, and found her professor had already written to her.

*Your masturbation assignment remains the same. If you persist in declining the opportunity to orgasm to thoughts of fucking Mr Goldstein, then you may write a four thousand word essay. The topic of the essay will be as follows:*
(1) Outline your understanding of the obligations and duties of the submissive in a D/s relationship
(2) Outline your understanding of the obligation and duties of the Dominant in a D/s relationship
(3) Detail your hopes for your future service of the Dominant to whom you offer your submission

Hermione stared at the journal with mouth-gaping indignation. Four thousand words? It was already eleven o’clock—it would take her hours to write that much! She would be exhausted in the morning, not to mention looking like a hag for the ball tomorrow night from lack of sleep!

Of course, if she didn’t complete the assignment, it would give her professor an excuse to punish her. And she had no way of knowing when he had entered this assignment in her journal—it didn’t exactly come with a time stamp, did it? He might have put this assignment in her book at seven o’clock, when she was busy moderating an argument between some fourth-year girls, or at eight o’clock, when she was doing her Transfiguration homework. He had no way of knowing she wouldn’t get to her journal until this late—and she had known she would have another writing assignment from him tonight, hadn’t she? She might have had the foresight to check earlier in the evening for her assignment.

With a sigh of resignation, she took up her quill. He was asking some very specific questions, really—it was a perfect opportunity to tell him what she wanted from him, what she wanted to give him, and how she would serve him, given the chance. Of course, she would couch it all in rather vague wording—she wouldn’t come out and beg to belong to him. Pushing aside any concern regarding the lateness of the hour, she began to write.

Potions class on Friday afternoon was nerve wracking. Once again, Professor Snape gave the class their assignment, then ordered Hermione into the storeroom.

Harry frowned. ‘What have you done to get up Snape’s nose, Hermione?’ he said quietly.

Hermione just shook her head, snatching up her gloves and going into the storeroom, unsurprised to find the barrel of newt intestines where she had left it. Pulling her gloves on, she plunged her hands into the disgusting mess.

‘Did I say you could use gloves?’

His voice was right behind her, and Hermione jerked around, her heart in her throat, beating an uneven cadence. She hadn’t stood this close to him since Sunday night—she could smell his aftershave, overpowered by the stench of the brine dripping from her gloves.

She spoke, her voice uneven. ‘If I don’t wear the gloves, I will smell like newt intestines for the next two days.’

One eyebrow rose interrogatively. ‘What’s your point?’

Her chin came up. ‘You just want me to smell disgusting for the ball tonight!’

He sneered. ‘Your social life is of no concern to me. You are not permitted to wear the gloves to organise the newt intestines.’

‘Then I won’t do it,’ she said, knowing she sounded a bit shrill but unable to control her voice.
‘Then you will take another zero,’ he said dangerously, his eyes glittering. ‘How many zeros can your class average take before you fall below Outstanding, I wonder?’

Hermione stood before him, trembling with a combination of fury and desire. Dear Merlin, what was wrong with her, that he could stand there being an absolute git, and all she wanted was to kneel at his feet and beg him to fuck her?

His eyes raked over her. ‘Of course, if you find yourself unequal to the task, I suppose you can come in for detention to deal with the newt intestines.’

‘Yes!’ Hermione agreed instantly. Detention would be just the two of them, wouldn’t it?

But his smile, like that of a crocodile, alerted her that he had wanted her to make this choice.

‘Saturday morning, seven o’clock,’ he said. ‘Don’t be late.’

‘But …’ she blurted—but she was speaking to empty air. He had departed the storeroom in a swirl of black cloak.

Honestly! The ball wasn’t set to end until one o’clock in the morning! Surely he didn’t expect her to be in the dungeons at seven in the morning after being up so late?

Gritting her teeth, she removed her soiled gloves and cast a Cleansing Charm on them before sweeping past her smirking professor to take up her bag and depart Potions early for the second time that week.

That night, she stood before the full length mirror she had conjured and twirled slowly, very pleased with her appearance. Her dress was bronze, a design Lavender had rather deftly copied for her from one of Parvati’s magazines. The squared neckline draped softly across her chest, just where her cleavage began to show, and the skirt stopped at mid-thigh, a rather daring length for Hermione. But there was an over-skirt, which fell in flowing folds to the tips of her shoes; it opened down the front, but that did not become apparent until she began to walk, and with each step, her nylon-sheathed legs peeked through. She was terribly pleased with her undergarments, as well, and she had every intention of wearing them for her professor sometime during the upcoming holiday. She wore silky nylons which attached to a frilly black garter belt; her knickers were a satiny black, figured with silvery-white snowflakes, and her bra matched the underpants. Lavender and Parvati had applied her make-up, adding a rather intoxicating perfume at her throat. Hermione had put her hair up on her own, using copious amounts of Sleekeazy’s Hair Potion, and she was pleased with the tendrils which graced her nape. All in all, she thought she looked prettier than she had ever done—and she hoped that the sight of her pierced her professor to the core.
Head held high, Hermione left her room and joined the throngs of students wending their way down to the entrance hall.

‘Hermione!’

She turned to find Harry and Ginny walking along, hand-in-hand; Harry was smiling with genuine admiration.

‘Hi,’ she said, smiling back at him.

‘You look amazing,’ he said sincerely.

Ginny rolled her eyes. ‘He doesn’t mean to make it sound as if that’s completely unexpected,’ she assured Hermione. ‘That’s a fabulous dress—where did you find it?’

The three friends began to walk again, Ginny in the middle, her head bent to Hermione’s as they discussed their ball finery. When they climbed down the marble staircase to the entrance hall, Anthony Goldstein was upon them within seconds.

‘Hi, Hermione,’ he said, having eyes for no one else.

Hermione gave an apologetic smile to Harry, who answered with a broad wink before leading Ginny toward the Great Hall.

‘Hi, Anthony,’ Hermione answered, smiling kindly. ‘Thank you for inviting me to come with you.’

From his superior height, Anthony eyed her up, his pale green eyes lingering rather overlong on her chest. ‘You look beautiful,’ he said earnestly.

Resisting the urge to remind him to speak to her face rather than her breasts, Hermione tucked her hand in his arm in a friendly manner. ‘Shall we go into the Great Hall?’

As soon as they entered the specially decorated room, Hermione was on the lookout for her professor. She scanned the perimeter of the room, searching out his tall, black-clothed form, but she did not see him. All of her other teachers were present, she saw, wearing their smartest party things, but there was no sign of the pale face of her Potions professor.

*He’ll be here,* she thought. *He won’t be able to stay away.*

She danced the first two dances with Anthony, who was on his best behaviour—truly, his mum
would have been proud—except for the way his eyes kept straying to her neckline. It made her regret
the evening in Hogsmeade when, just to irritate her professor, she had deliberately flaunted herself at
Anthony. What did Anthony imagine was going to happen tonight? Well, she’d worry about that
later. For now, she had to assume her professor was watching her, whether she could see him or not,
and it was up to her to give him a good show.

After the second dance, Hermione told Anthony she wanted a drink, and she took a seat at one of the
small tables about the edge of the room. Anthony scurried away to seek out the Butterbeer she had
requested, and she fanned herself discreetly as she performed another survey of the room, still
looking for the pale face and piercing eyes of Severus Snape. Where was he? What was he doing?
What if he had chosen to retaliate by going to the village to see Taffy Smith? Would the Headmaster
give him leave not to attend the Yule Ball?

What if she had gone to all this trouble for nothing?

Anthony returned then with their drinks. Hermione accepted hers with a smile and sipped at it while
listening to her date talk about his job prospects when they had left school. She noted with some
disquiet that he drank rather too quickly, reminding her forcibly of when Ron had guzzled his
father’s entire stash of honey mead and spent all of New Year’s Day sicking up in a basin while the
rest of them played Exploding Snap and enjoyed Mrs Weasley’s fine cooking.

As if in answer to his name, Ron appeared at Hermione’s elbow. ‘Will you dance this one with me?’
he asked her, ignoring Anthony.

Hermione took Ron’s hand and stood. ‘You don’t mind, do you Anthony?’

With a look that clearly said he did mind, Anthony replied, ‘Not at all. I’ll just wait here, shall I?’

Ron, whose dancing skills had improved a great deal in recent years, wasted no time. ‘That prat is
spending all his time staring at your chest,’ he said baldly.

‘Thank you, Ronald,’ Hermione said sourly. ‘I had noticed, actually.’

‘And he downed a whole glass of honey mead before he even got back to your table,’ her friend
continued inexorably. ‘Do you want me to have a word?’

‘No!’ she answered crossly. ‘I can take care of myself—why don’t you try paying half this much
attention to your own date?’

Ron grinned and gave her a twirl. ‘Because I trod on her toes and she’s dancing with Neville,’ he
admitted. The song came to an end and he led her back towards Anthony, whose glass was now
empty. Anthony was watching her approach with a feverish avidity. ‘Really, I wouldn’t mind
warning him off,’ Ron said, giving the Ravenclaw boy a forbidding glare.

‘I can handle it,’ she assured him as Anthony rose and walked toward them.

‘Let’s dance again,’ he said hopefully.

But Harry had arrived at the same time. ‘This dance is mine, mate,’ he informed Anthony, neatly
stepping between them and claiming Hermione’s hand.

Hermione gave Anthony a smile as she allowed Harry to take her onto the dance floor.
‘Did you and Ron plan this out?’ she asked, torn between amusement and exasperation.

‘I don’t like the way he’s looking at you,’ Harry said seriously, ignoring her question and getting directly to the point.

‘Harry,’ she said, ‘I appreciate your concern, but I can handle Anthony Goldstein.’

‘I don’t know why you came with him,’ Harry said, frowning down into her face.

‘Because he asked me,’ Hermione snapped.

Harry gave his head a shake. ‘Look at you,’ he said. ‘You’re so pretty—why don’t blokes ask you out?’

Hermione reached up and pecked him on the cheek, touched by his concern. ‘Because they don’t like me,’ she said. ‘Some people are put off by people smarter than they are.’

The dance came to an end, and Harry was moved to enfold her in a hug. ‘Then people are idiots,’ he said into her ear. ‘Where would I be without your brains?’

Hermione stepped back from him with a warm look. ‘Go dance with Ginny,’ she said, giving him a final pat upon the cheek.

Harry grinned and turned away, and Hermione found herself staring across the Great Hall, directly into the furious eyes of Severus Snape. He stood against the wall, wearing dress robes of heavy black velvet over his usual severely tailored black wool suit. His arms were crossed over his chest and he leaned one shoulder against the stone wall, a mighty sneer upon his lips. Hermione could not but stare, transfixed by the intensity of his gaze, until Anthony rushed up to her and grasped her arm with a sweaty hand.

‘You’re my date,’ he reminded her, his pale eyes now glassy with too much drink, his skin tone a near-match for his eye colour.

‘Do you feel all right?’ she asked him, concerned that he might sick up on her shoes.

‘No,’ he said. ‘But I don’t want you to dance with other blokes.’

‘Maybe you could do with some fresh air?’ she suggested, thinking the cold might sober him up a bit.

‘Yes,’ he agreed readily, turning his hungry gaze on her face. ‘Yes, let’s go for a walk outside.’

It really was the last thing she wanted to do, to go with Anthony Goldstein out amongst the couples who had slipped outside for a bit of a snog, but she also didn’t want him to be sick all over the floor. Wouldn’t that be a fine end to her attempt to make her professor jealous?

Uncomplaining, she allowed him to hold her hand and lead her through the entrance hall and out onto the grounds. As was customary for these functions, some small effort had been made to create a garden with interesting grottos, lit by live faeries in the flowering bushes. A three-quarter moon rode in the sky, and the crisp, cold air certainly worked to shock Hermione into full alertness. It also seemed to help Anthony; the greenish pallor left his features, leaving him just pasty—but apparently
recovered enough to try to steal a kiss.

‘Stop it,’ Hermione said crossly when he seized her and thrust her against a rather prickly holly bush.

Floppy lips fastened wetly to her throat. ‘I know you want me,’ he said thickly. ‘Ever since that night in Hogsmeade.’

Hermione groped for her wand. ‘You’re raving,’ she informed him, settling for a neat thrust of her knee in the general direction of his crotch.

‘Hey!’ he said, twisting to evade her knee and tightening his hold on her upper arms.

Hermione struggled to free herself from him and was helped tremendously by the shadowy figure which plucked Goldstein up as if he were a rag doll and gave him a shake before speaking in Professor Snape’s iciest tones.

‘Twenty points from Ravenclaw for drunkenness and general idiocy, Goldstein,’ the professor said, releasing Anthony abruptly, which caused the Ravenclaw to stagger and sit down rather hard on the cold ground.

‘Thank you,’ Hermione said, glaring down at Goldstein with distaste.

The wrathful black eyes turned on her. ‘And twenty points from Gryffindor for rank stupidity,’ he hissed.

Goldstein struggled to his feet. ‘Come on, Hermione,’ he said, staggering a bit. ‘I’ll take you back inside.’

Professor Snape turned on the boy. ‘You, Goldstein, will report at once to Madam Pomfrey for a Sobering Draught—then you may return to your common room. If I see you again in the Great Hall tonight, the Headmaster will receive a full report on your comportment at this function.’

Hermione watched with an almost clinical curiosity as Anthony’s face screwed up, as if he were going to tell Professor Snape off, but then he appeared to think better of it, for he turned and stalked away without another word.

‘Honestly!’ Hermione said, watching him go. ‘What an idiot!’

In an instant, her professor was standing so close to her that she was engulfed in the smell of his aftershave, the scent memory sending her spiralling abruptly into need. She reached out her hands, smoothing them along the luxurious velvet robes, keenly aware of the increasing rate of her heart beat.

‘I would have expected you to have more sense than to go off alone with a drunken teenage boy,’ her professor said, his tone cold and distant.

She looked up into his face, the light from the faeries casting shadows around them in the grotto, but providing enough illumination for Hermione to clearly see his fathomless eyes, which held an expression she could not quite place. She had thought he was becoming easier for her to read, but in this moment, he was a complete enigma to her. They were alone in a dark, secluded, romantic setting, and all he wanted to do was upbraid her?
‘I’ve missed you,’ she said, swaying towards him, meaning to kiss him, but his hands were not gentle as he thrust her away from him.

‘Go to your room, Granger,’ he said flatly.

Stung, Hermione lifted her chin and crossed her arms over her breasts. ‘I won’t,’ she cried. ‘I spent a lot of time getting ready for this ball, and it’s not half over yet!’

His gaze raked down her body. ‘Yes, you are a proper tart, tonight—no wonder Goldstein thought you were on offer.’

Fuelled by a furious mix of indignation and hurt feelings, she slapped at his face, but his reflexes were quick; his hand closed about her wrist in a vise-like grip. ‘You forget yourself,’ he said dangerously.

‘Let me go!’ she exclaimed, and to her surprise, he immediately released her, sending her reeling back out of the grotto. Without pausing to speak to him again, Hermione all but ran back into the castle.

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A quick trip to the loo allowed her to tidy her hair and calm herself before returning to the Great Hall. She was in an agony of distress over her professor, but she would not let that show. Why had he been so unkind? Why had he said something so cruel about her appearance? Why hadn’t he taken advantage of being alone with her—to at least say something personal, rather than remaining in his unapproachable Professor Snape guise?

Why was this evening going so completely pear-shaped?

When she was calm, she returned to the Great Hall and made her way to the refreshments table, wanting something cool to drink. Accepting a goblet of punch from a house-elf, she sought out her friends and joined their table.

‘Where’s Goldstein?’ Ron asked, looking over her shoulder. ‘Did he drink himself into a coma?’

Hermione shrugged. ‘Not exactly, but close,’ she admitted. ‘Can I sit here with you?’

Ginny leaned past Harry and patted her hand. ‘Of course you can,’ she said. ‘You can’t let that dress go to waste! I’m sure you’ll have plenty of partners.’

Hermione grinned, feeling her spirits grow lighter. ‘That’s what I was thinking,’ she admitted.

Colin Creevey careened up to her. ‘Hermione! Will you dance with me?’

Hermione surveyed the sixth-year boy with some misgiving. It wasn’t exactly what she had had in mind … but it was better than being sent to her room like a firstie, wasn’t it?

‘Thanks, Colin,’ she said, accepting his hand.
All in all, Hermione decided she liked it better not to have a date for the ball. She danced with many different boys, from all the different Houses, save Slytherin, without having to fend off the unwanted advances of any of them. More than one of her partners told her she was looking particularly pretty that night, and Hermione revelled in the admiration, finding that it was a balm to her hurt feelings.

But by far the best part of the rest of the evening was the presence of her professor, watching her unceasingly. Every time she looked for him, she found him, his unwavering regard focussed on her. He moved about the room, from dark corner to dark corner, but he remained present in the Great Hall, rather than stalking about the grounds, blasting rose bushes, and although he might have been watching the entire student body, every time she looked for him, he was watching her.

So she gave him something to watch.

She was completely animated, laughing up into her partners’ eyes, smiling, chatting, and vivacious. It was work for her, as such extroversion was not her natural bent, but it was gratifying in its results, for her partners appeared to be quite taken with her. By the end of the evening, she had received two invitations to tea at Madam Puddifoot’s on the next Hogsmeade weekend, both of which she side-stepped with, ‘We’ll see,’ and one invitation to a tryst on the Astronomy Tower, which she laughingly declined.

At one o’clock, she trekked out of the Great Hall with the other students; after all, she had detention in six hours. Tactfully, she allowed the couples to pull away from her. She felt rather giddy with the combination of appreciative male attention and the close, constant scrutiny of her professor, his dogged observation of her movements doing much to assuage her hurt at his earlier words and actions.

She climbed the staircases to the seventh floor, careful not to notice the couples entwined in the dark corners and recesses of the corridor. With her eyes focussed on the stone floor, she was taken completely by surprise when she was seized and jerked into a dim alcove, a large hand covering her mouth as a hard body pressed her against the wall.

‘What are you playing at?’ her professor hissed, his free hand slipping deftly through the slit of her overdress and up her thigh to cup her quim. ‘Don’t you know this belongs to me?’

Hermione felt her initial panic morph into excitement as she stared wide-eyed up into the glittering black eyes of Severus Snape. Arching her neck, she pressed her lips against the palm of his hand, inhaling through her nose, her body reacting sharply to the testosterone rolling from him in unrelenting waves.

The hand on her mouth pressed her head back against the wall, while the hand curved about her quim squeezed. ‘Well?’ he demanded aggressively. ‘Do you know it, or don’t you?’

Unable to speak, Hermione could only nod her head affirmatively, simultaneously grinding herself against the hand on her cunt. Dear Merlin did she know it.

‘That’s right,’ he hissed, his fingers slipping past the elastic of her knickers, finding and parting her labia before plunging inside of her, drawing a moan from her throat.

He was touching her … touching her … would he make her come? Please, Merlin …

He watched her face, his eyes darkening with arousal. ‘Yes, you’re my needy little slut, aren’t you?’
He purred, fingering her with maddening slowness and ghosting his thumb over her clitoris. ‘You need this from me, don’t you?’

Hermione widened her stance, her thighs obscenely spread to facilitate his fingering of her slickness, her head lolling to one side as she moaned aloud.

He circled her clitoris firmly, his other hand sliding from her lips to close about her throat. ‘Good girl, be loud for me—show me how much I please you. Your classmates will hear you and peek in to see you getting off with your Potions master.’

Alarmed, Hermione jerked her head to the side, seeing another couple grappling directly across the corridor from where she was being molested by Professor Snape; to her horror, Harry and Ginny walked by at the moment, their arms wrapped about one another.

Her professor’s hand tightened slightly upon her throat, and she directed her attention back to him. ‘Don’t be daft,’ he growled, his hand slipping from her throat and dipping beneath the draped neckline of her dress, cupped her breast and lifting it with little resistance from her balcony bra. ‘There’s a Notice-Me-Not spell—and *Muffliato.*’ Then he dipped his head, his lips closing about her areola.

Reduced in mere seconds to a mass of quivering need, Hermione laced her fingers in his hair even as she slid about on his fingers, and he responded by suckling insistently at her breast, sending trails of fire down to her quim. She felt as if she were an inferno of lust, her very blood burning in her veins, and wanted to set him afire as well. She slipped a hand between them, seeking and finding the bulging length in his trousers—sweet Circe how she wanted to touch and taste and fuck his cock. She skimmed from the top of his erection down to his bollocks, gently lifting, and he growled against her breast.

He raised his head, his eyes fierce, and retaliated by grasping her clitoris between his thumb and forefinger and plucking at it as if playing a stringed instrument; Hermione shuddered, feeling as if one more sensation would fragment her to dust. Even so, she slid her hand back up to his belt and tugged the leather tip from its buckle.

‘No,’ he commanded, and she stopped at once, her only protest a whimper.

She grasped his length again, noting that he made no objection, and his face spasmed with pleasure, his eyes closed, his teeth bared, as if to prevent himself from vocalising. His two long fingers slipped back up her channel, gathering moisture, which his thumb applied assiduously to her aching clitoris, and then his face descended, and he was kissing her, fucking her mouth with his tongue as his fingers mimicked the action below, the perfect applied pressure of his thumb supplying the impetus for the disintegration she had feared. Hermione came apart, breaking their kiss with a moaning, throaty gasp, and Severus Snape promptly fastened his mouth to hers again, swallowing every whimper as the hand in her quim slowed its movement until it and she were completely still.

With one last gentle squeeze to her mound, he readjusted her knickers and raised the fingers slick with her secretions to her lips. ‘Clean me,’ he commanded, his lips mere millimetres from hers, and Hermione obediently took his fingers deep into her mouth, sucking them clean of her essence.

She allowed her lips to part again, and he removed his fingers, leaning slightly away from her to stare down her body. She imagined what he saw as he looked at her—her mouth, fragrant with her own scent, one breast exposed, straining the neckline of her dress, her parted thighs, slightly sticky from their activities—and then he looked into her face, his breathing slightly irregular.
‘I’ve never seen anything so beautiful,’ he said, and she felt a plunging sensation, as if she had stepped off a ledge into thin air. He kissed her again, capturing the taste of her cunt from her mouth, sucking her lips as if loath to lose the tiniest taste of her.

He released her only when a grunt from across the corridor announced the completion of the other couple’s after-hours groping. Hermione and her professor turned their heads in time to see a satisfied-looking Ron emerge from the shadows, leading Parvati Patil, who was scrubbing at her mouth with a handkerchief.

Then her professor took her chin in his hand with infinite tenderness and turned her face until their eyes met. ‘We have some serious things to discuss, Hermione,’ he said gravely. ‘Will you come to my study tonight? I would prefer to talk now.’

Hermione straightened up from the rough stone wall and tucked herself back into her dress, her after-orgasm glow dissipating abruptly. What did he want to talk about?

‘Of course,’ she answered quietly.

He touched her sheathed wand with a fingertip. ‘Use a Disillusionment Charm,’ he advised. ‘Leave here in ten minutes. I will see you there.’

Without another word, he Disillusioned himself and slipped into the now deserted corridor. Hermione consulted her wristwatch and steeled herself for the longest ten minute wait of her life.
Hermione reached the professor’s office, and before she could touch the handle, the door opened to admit her. She slipped inside, removing her Disillusionment Charm, and found Professor Snape waiting for her, one hip resting on the corner of his desk. He still wore the luxurious black velvet dress robes, and he looked like some ancient Dark prince of old, the planes of his face austere beneath his burning black eyes. Hermione felt an ache in her chest from the beauty of him—for how she needed him and wanted him with every fibre of her being.

She opened her lips to greet him, but he silenced her before she could speak.

‘Thank you for coming,’ he said, his voice devoid of emotion. ‘I would like to have our discussion in my study, but I wanted you to be aware that the rules which I had previously established for you are now lifted.’

Hermione’s tongue darted out to moisten her lips. She didn’t like the sound of that. What did he mean, ‘are now lifted’? Permanently? No, that couldn’t be right. But better not ask too many questions, just now. ‘All right,’ she said.

He stood and courteously motioned for her to precede him into the study; she slipped past, relishing the warm, familiar scent of him. The study was softly lit by the crackling fire and the oil lamps. On a low table near the sofa, a tea service was laid out. Unsure of where he wanted her, Hermione perched uncertainly on the edge of the cobalt blue sofa, and her professor shrugged out of his black velvet dress robes, leaving them draped over one armchair while he shifted the other to face her, then sat.

‘I am going to have a cup of tea,’ he said, pouring some into a cup. ‘Would you care to join me?’

Hermione fought the impulse to wring her hands. His manner was making her very nervous. She certainly didn’t feel as if she could swallow anything, but to refuse seemed churlish.

‘Thank you,’ she said, watching as he added two sugars and a splash of milk to a cup before passing it to her. She felt a dim pleasure that he remembered exactly how she liked her tea, and as she accepted the saucer, she deliberately grazed his hand with her fingertips.

His head jerked up at the contact, and his eyes fastened on her face for a moment before he looked away again, pouring a cup for himself and sitting back in the armchair. He began to drink, seemingly lost in abstraction, and rather than break the silence when she was uncertain of his mood, Hermione sipped at her cup. The warmth was lovely, and almost against her will, she found herself calming under the familiar ritual of drinking tea. She closed her eyes for a moment, taking another mouthful of perfectly prepared Earl Grey. Everything was all right—nothing terrible was going to happen. He probably wanted to discuss her detention, which was set to occur in less than six hours, now—perhaps he would delay the starting time or cancel it altogether …
The rattle of china alerted her that he had set his cup on the tea tray, and she directed her attention back to him.

‘Are you finished?’ he inquired politely. ‘Would you care for more?’

Hermione felt her complacency dissolve like fabric beneath acid—why was he acting like this? Like some sort of robotic imitation of a Potions master? She leaned forward and set her cup and saucer on the tray. ‘No thank you,’ she said quietly, giving in to her anxiety and permitting herself to wring her hands. She had a very bad feeling about this.

Professor Snape cleared his throat and straightened in his chair, grasping the chair arms with his long-fingered hands. ‘Hermione,’ he said, looking directly into her face, ‘I owe you an apology.’

Hermione only just managed not to let her mouth gape open in amazement. Of all the things she had thought he might say to her, this was not one of them. ‘You do?’ she said, bemused.

‘Yes,’ he answered, his voice losing its flat, even quality as harshness showed through. ‘As your Dominant, it is my job to be fair, up front, direct, and perfectly clear in my communications with you.’

Hermione watched him nervously as a hard, disdainful expression settled on his features.

‘It is my responsibility to deal with you from a position of calm, reasoned authority. A Dominant should never discipline a submissive based on his emotions. There is a place for emotion in the dealings between a Dominant and a submissive, but it is never a factor in her discipline.’ He drew a ragged breath. ‘In the last week, I have failed you utterly.’

Hermione stared at him, dumbfounded. He had certainly been a right bastard to her ever since Anthony Goldstein had invited her to the Yule Ball, but she had never expected him to own up to it. She had known it was wrong of him to take out his bloody-mindedness on her, but she had been willing to overlook it because … because he was the most important person in her life. And because deep inside, she knew exactly why he was upset, even if he did not.

Now he straightened still further, giving the appearance of a stone statue rather than a living being, his shoulders rigidly even, and under her frightened gaze, his face once again emptied of expression.

‘You are well within your rights to terminate your association with me,’ he said tonelessly. ‘I will provide a letter of recommendation for you when you leave school, as well as a letter of introduction to the D/s circles in London. I will make it clear that it was through no fault of your own that your training was cut short.’ The tiniest flicker of emotion touched him and was ruthlessly repelled with a minute shake of his head, causing the ends of his hair to sway against his black-clothed shoulders. ‘I release you from your training, Hermione. Your progress has been little short of astonishing; you should be very proud of yourself.’

He rose from his armchair, his movements lacking his usual grace and fluidity, and he stood at attention, as if waiting for her to rise as well. Hermione stared at him, a desolate hollowness in her middle where her tummy used to be, spreading its deadening tendrils through her with alarming swiftness. Released her? He was sending her away—she was no longer to be in training with him—he was removing himself as her Dominant!

‘No!’ she cried, keeping her seat, unable to organise herself enough to stand.
She saw his jaw clench, and he turned his eyes in her direction, seeming to be looking at a spot to her left. ‘Did you have a question?’ he said.

A feeling like a lump of lead in her mid-section held her in her seat, but her brain continued to function independently of her feelings. ‘Do I not have any say in this decision?’ she asked, striving to sound logical.

A nerve in his cheek jumped, but his manner did not relent. ‘You are, unfortunately, ill-informed to make such a choice,’ he said, his voice rather thin, as if his breathing were somehow impaired. ‘Your training is not far enough advanced, nor have you had enough exposure to the D/s lifestyle, to have the tools to judge whether or not I have behaved appropriately.’ He swallowed and looked again into her eyes. ‘I hope you can bring yourself to—’ his voice wavered ‘trust me one last time to take the action in your best interests.’

Trust him? Of course she trusted him! Yes, he’d been a git about the Yule Ball, but she would willingly follow him into fire—there was no question in her mind. Oh, what was the matter with him? What was the real issue?

‘Of course I trust you,’ she said simply, her mind whirling, looking for a way past his determined distancing of himself from her.

The tic in his cheek jumped again. ‘It is kind of you to say so,’ he said woodenly.

She studied him, pushing away the panic which threatened to overwhelm her thinking. He was angry with himself! He actually thought he had committed an unforgiveable act towards her. Yet even so, he had pinned her to the wall and fingered her quim, whispering filthy, possessive words into her ear—he had called her beautiful, in all her post-climax disarray—and he had been aroused, too. This wasn’t about her at all—it was about him—about his lack of emotional control.

He still wanted her—why else would he be holding himself so rigidly? He still wanted her, but he felt he had put himself beyond the pale. She took a deep, deliberate breath, feeling her panic recede in the wake of absolute certainty: She had the power in this situation, if she could figure out how to use it properly. In this moment, when he was sending her away from him forever, she had the best opportunity she was ever likely to have to obtain the deepest wish of her heart.

‘You feel that your behaviour this week has been inexcusable?’ she asked, almost sick from the wild surge of adrenaline that flooded her body.

‘I know it has been,’ he answered shortly.

Hermione forced herself to relax against the sofa cushions, and she crossed one leg over the other, the bronze overskirt falling open to show her legs, sleek in sheer stockings. ‘I forgive you,’ she said.

He showed the first signs of real life he had displayed since their tryst in the alcove, his chin rising sharply, his nostrils flaring, even as his eyes shot daggers at her. ‘I have not asked for your forgiveness,’ he spat, pronouncing the last word as if it were an obscenity.

Hermione cheered inside, her face showing no sign of her delight. There! He was engaged, now—he was offended that she would dare to offer forgiveness. Excellent!

‘Of course not,’ she agreed easily. ‘I see that you don’t feel forgiveness for your transgressions is
even possible—but I forgive you, nevertheless.’ She smiled up at him gently, trying not to betray the insane physical reactions her body was producing in response to her gamble—and how desperately she wanted it to succeed. Her heart was pounding erratically, her hands were slick with sweat, and the competing impulses to either fling herself at him or flee the room were blaring like Klaxon horns in the back of her mind.

His fists clenched, as if he would like to hit her, and his lips thinned to an angry white line. ‘It is not for you to forgive!’ he snarled at her.

‘It is certainly my right to forgive you, if I choose to do so,’ she said quietly. ‘What I need for you to do, please, is to forgive yourself—because I have no desire at all to leave my training with you—and I will resist with all the weapons at my disposal any effort on your part to send me away.’

His eyes flashed dangerously. ‘Are you threatening me?’ he demanded.

She watched his segue from self-reproach to rageful anger, knowing that every word he spoke was directed not at her but at himself. The knowledge buoyed her confidence, and as the last of her fear melted away, she rose to her feet.

‘I would never do something so disrespectful,’ she said firmly, stepping forward and laying her hands upon his chest, looking up into his face. ‘It seems we need to discuss the emotion which drove you to act as you did, though. What was it?’

His chest heaved, his wrathful eyes darting from her face to the sight of her hands upon his coat, then back again. With what appeared to be an almighty effort, he wrenched away from her and turned his back, striding jerkily to the fireplace. He stopped at the hearth, studying the crackling fire, and he was silent for so long that Hermione did not think he would answer her.

‘Possessiveness,’ he croaked at last. ‘It was possessiveness.’

Cautiously, she approached him, a relief close to giddiness singing through her mind. ‘I feel possessive of you,’ she said, reaching him and stretching her arms about his waist from behind, burying her face in the scratchy wool covering his back. ‘You know I do—I go crazy every time I even think you’re going to Hogsmeade to see Taffy Smith.’

She could feel him stiffen in her embrace. ‘I won’t discuss that with you,’ he said.

Hermione flattened her palms on his stomach, her fingers finding and fondling the buttons of his coat. She turned her face so that her cheek rested between his shoulder blades. ‘All right,’ she said, daring to unbutton his coat and smooth her hands up the soft lawn of his white shirt, loving the feel of his toned body beneath her hands. ‘But will you discuss your possessiveness with me?’

He turned quickly, capturing her wrists in his hands, and he looked sternly down into her face. ‘This is not a matter of which to make light,’ he said tautly. ‘It is very serious.’

Hermione took a deep breath and laid her heart at his feet. ‘I am in dead earnest, sir,’ she said, her face raised to his, knowing she had abandoned subtlety and not caring. ‘If we can’t discuss your feelings of possessiveness, how else am I to convince you that I choose you for my Master—that I want to offer my submission to you, and to you alone?’

He went completely still, his midnight eyes widening slightly, even as he released her hands. And although Hermione strained to hear his least response, the only sound to be heard was the ticking of
the carriage clock over the mantelpiece.
His shoulders, which he had held rigidly for so long, slumped slightly, and he dragged a hand wearily over his face. ‘Hermione,’ he said, and it came out as a tortured groan.

She stepped close to him and fisted her hands in his shirt. ‘Please, sir,’ she said, terrified that he would do or say something terrible—something irreparable. ‘Please consider what I have to say—hear me out.’

His hands dropped to his sides, and he stared down into her face. She prepared herself for him to enter her mind, but he didn’t do so, and she dimly wondered if he lacked the magical strength to do so. She had not noticed it before, but up close, he showed all the physical signs of exhaustion. Had he not been resting well?

Gently, he disentangled her hands from his clothing. ‘You had better sit down again,’ he said, sounding resigned.

He wasn’t saying no—he wasn’t sending her away—he was going to talk to her about it! On legs suddenly quivering with excitement, she went back and resumed her seat on the sofa, watching him as he retraced his steps to the armchair. His brow was furrowed as he sat back, but Hermione detected a slight shift in his manner. He seemed less like a polite host and more like a Dominant, preparing to discuss matters of consequence with a submissive.

Still, his face was expressionless as he nodded his head to her and said, ‘Say what you wish to say.’

Her mouth seemed quite suddenly very dry, and her mind was alarmingly blank. The reasoned arguments she had so carefully laid out time and time again in the privacy of her room had deserted her. Come on, Hermione! she thought frantically. Surely her logic wouldn’t desert her in her time of need! Any moment now, she would be able to think again …

‘Sir,’ she blurted, playing for time, ‘have you considered that your feelings of possessiveness might be because of a desire to have a deeper relationship with me?’

His lips contracted with displeasure, and he spoke sharply. ‘I have agreed to discuss your issues, Hermione—not mine.’

Damn! She had obtained his agreement for discussion, and all she had accomplished so far was to irritate him. She would have to do better than this, and quickly, or her chance would be lost. Marshalling her thoughts, she took a calming breath and began.

‘I know my own mind, sir. I know precisely what I want. I want to learn to be a submissive by your hand, and I want to belong to you. I want you for my Master.’
He did not react to her words, but his attention was fully engaged, and the twirl of his forefinger indicated that she was to get on with it. How can I prove my sincerity? she thought frantically. What can I say to convince him? Oh, please ...

As if in answer to a prayer, the answer came to her in a blinding flash of brilliance—she knew exactly what she wanted to say to him. Sweet Circe, someone was looking out for her tonight!

Drawing in a deep breath, Hermione said, ‘We have a three week holiday before us, sir. I propose that you keep me on as a trainee, but that you step up the training to incorporate some of the things you would expect of your own submissive—things like—’ She stumbled over the next bit, but she had read about it in The Sensual Symmetry of Submission and was determined to say it. ‘—like w-worshipping your cock, the art of fellatio, and how you like to be f-fucked.’ She scarcely got the last bit out. Although she had been writing quite frankly in her journal, she wasn’t accustomed to saying things of a sexual nature out loud, and she could feel her face flaming red.

He raised one eyebrow, and her tummy flipped over. Dear Merlin, he was relenting.

‘And at the end of the three week holiday?’ he asked.

Hermione sat forward eagerly. ‘At the end of the hols, you can decide if you will accept my offer of submission to you. We could re-evaluate things and carry on from there.’ Unable to contain herself, she rose and covered the space between them, falling on her knees before him. ‘Please say yes, sir,’ she begged, daring to run her hands along his lean thighs. ‘I promise you I will work harder than any submissive has ever worked to please her Dominant.’

He looked down his torso into her eyes, his black eyes glittering strangely. ‘And how many cocks have you pleasured in your life, Hermione?’ he asked softly, the intensity of his voice striking a chord within her, heavy with import.

‘I … I haven’t, I guess,’ she admitted.

His nostrils flared. ‘And what gives you the impression that cock worship is something that would appeal to you?’

She bit her lip. He asked the most difficult questions of any person she had ever known!

‘Or are you, perhaps, saying what you imagine I want to hear?’ he added.

‘No!’ she said immediately. She was just going to have to tell him, wasn’t she? ‘I think about your cock all the time,’ she admitted, lowering her eyes in embarrassment. ‘I did before you were ill, and then afterwards—when I had seen you stroke it—I knew exactly what it looked like.’ His finger stroked down her cheek to her chin, raising her face again. She smiled at him, and in response, a slight smile touched his lips. She continued softly, feeling discomfited, but determined to tell him what he needed to know. ‘Once I knew what it looked like, it was even easier to imagine it—to think about touching, and licking, and sucking it—to think about you fucking me.’

His eyelids lowered to half-mast, the strange glittering of his eyes only intensifying. He looked her over in a leisurely manner, but he seemed always to return his gaze to her mouth. ‘Tell me about the cocks you have encountered, Hermione—all of them. Have there been many?’

‘Two,’ she said. He had interrogated her about whom she had kissed, but he had been fingerimg her
when he did it, so she hadn’t minded talking about it. She would probably spill state secrets under the persuasion of his fingers in her cunt—but now, he was watching her without touching her, and it was much more difficult to speak of it. ‘The same two boys I kissed,’ she added. ‘Viktor and Ron.’

He nodded his acceptance. ‘And what did you do with these cocks?’

She averted her eyes, flustered. It all sounded so impersonal, speaking of it this way—and he still hadn’t told her if he accepted her proposal, had he?

Her took her chin in his hand and raised her face again. ‘Answer me, and do not look away again,’ he commanded, and she melted with shivery delight.

He was giving her orders, demanding obedience—that didn’t seem as if he were sending her away, did it? A frisson of happiness trembled through her.

‘I touched both of them,’ she admitted readily, trying to keep her mind from skittering ahead to what sort of activity might follow her answering his questions. Would he touch her again? Kiss her? Fuck her? ‘I had sex with both of them, but I also used my hand to bring Ron off a few times.’

Her professor’s head tilted minutely to the left. ‘And did he return this generosity?’

Hermione was surprised when she laughed out loud. ‘He made the attempt,’ she admitted.

‘No success?’ he asked.

‘I never orgasmed with Ron,’ Hermione told him. ‘I did with Viktor, but only when he used his fingers.’ She shifted slightly, aware of the heat slowly building between her legs.

As he quizzed her with almost professional curiosity, Professor Snape’s posture loosened, until it seemed he almost sprawled in his chair. His coat was open over his white shirt, his oily hair stringy about his face, sure testament to the fact that he had not showered before the Yule Ball, as was the darkening of the five o’clock shadow on his cheek. ‘So,’ he said, ‘you’ve never climaxed from being fucked, then?’

Wordlessly, she shook her head, and he actually smiled. ‘Well, there’s a goal to set for your three weeks’ trial,’ he said, his eyes darkening until she could not distinguish the iris from the pupil. ‘We’ll have to see if I can make you come by holding you down and thrusting slowly in and out of your cunt, brushing over your clit with every stroke of my cock in your quim.’

The impact of the carnality of his words robbed her momentarily of speech, and she sagged against him, held upright only by the vee of his thighs. He simply watched her as she clung to his leg. Her mind replayed what he had said, and at last, the first part of his statement penetrated her fog of lust. ‘I can have a three weeks’ trial?’ she gasped. ‘You’ll let me?’

His beautifully shaped lips twisted into a sensual sneer the likes of which she had never seen on his face before. ‘I’ll let you start now,’ he answered silkily. ‘Take out my cock, Hermione, and show me how much you want it.’

As he spoke, he settled back in his seat, moving his hands onto the arms of his chair, his gaze never moving from her face. Hermione was elated—he had accepted her offer, he wasn’t sending her away, he was going to fuck her to orgasm—but right now, he was expecting her to do something with his cock.
Well, she had read about it, she had studied the illustrations in Master Maximus’ book, and she was a quick learner, wasn’t she? How difficult could it be?

Leaning forward, she moved the tip of his belt out of the buckle, allowing the disengaged leather to hang down the front of his trousers, a frame for the distinct bulge behind the zip. Very aware of his eyes on her, she unfastened the button and eased down the zip, hearing his sharp intake of breath as she lightly touched the bulge. Spreading the fabric of the trousers wide, she deliberately grazed the heel of her palm up his length, feeling the spongy flesh on the front side of his cock. Her fingers now hooked in the elastic at the top of his pants, and she attempted to pull them down, only to find herself impeded by the knob of his cock.

‘Perhaps you had best pull them out before you pull them down,’ her professor said, sounding a bit breathless, and Hermione glanced up at his face, hoping he wasn’t upset with her for making a mistake so early on in her attempt. The crease always present between his brows deepened. ‘Go on—get on with it.’

Biting her lip in concentration, Hermione untangled the underpants from the top of his cock and pulled the elastic towards her, allowing his erection to spring free. As on the first occasion she’d seen it, she was fascinated—but this time, she could touch. Hurriedly, she tugged the pants down as far as she could, then closed her hand around him, amazed by the softness underlain by iron hardness.

It surprised her when he moved, thrusting up, forcing her hand down, and she glanced back up at him, delighted to see his head resting on the chair back, his eyes closed, his mouth slightly open as he panted. Experimentally, she slid her hand back up again, giving him a slight squeeze; he groaned and rolled his hips, grinding himself in her inexpert grasp. She didn’t know what she was doing, but it gave him pleasure for her to touch him—she could clearly see that—and oh, sweet Merlin, what would it be like to have this velvet-covered steel shaft inside of her? Her quim throbbed painfully at the very notion.

She remembered how he had pushed his foreskin back the night he masturbated for her, but he was so hard and aroused that the dark pink knob was more than half revealed through the opening already, glistening a bit. She stroked up, noting the way the skin moved with her, and when she reached the tip, she stroked down, completely exposing the glans, drawing a groan from him and a toss of his head. Tentatively, she passed the palm of her hand over the tip of his penis, feeling the slick moisture, and she rubbed it about, fascinated by his unrestrained, pleasure-seeking thrust and grind against her hand. She made a few more trips up and down, seeing how the lubricant eased her way. Just as she felt she was getting a rhythm going, he lifted his head and seared her with his eyes.

‘Have you ever put your mouth on a prick, little slut?’ he said, his hips moving his erection up and down in the circle of her grasp.

‘No,’ she said, her tongue darting out to moisten her lips, as if in anticipation.

‘Merlin’s bollocks, girl,’ he ground out, his gaze fixed on her lips. ‘Put your mouth on me.’

Remembering what she had read of t’s instructions on how she orally pleasured Master Maximus, Hermione lowered her face and placed an open-mouthed kiss near the base of her professor’s cock, teasing the fleshy underside with her tongue and applying a light sucking pressure as she moved her mouth up slowly, millimetre by millimetre, becoming bolder and more confident as she listened to his murmurs of encouragement. She was surprised, however, when her tongue licked lightly at the v-shape where his knob met his shaft, and his fingers came off the arms of the chair, pulling pins willy-
nilly from her hair until it hung down her back, and he wrapped his fingers in it.

‘Take it in your mouth now,’ he commanded, his voice low and purring, like a powerful engine at idle.

Hermione froze, her tongue tracing circles just beneath the head of his cock, feeling a trace of fear. What if she couldn’t do it? What if she hated it?

He pulled gently but insistently, raising her head and moving her mouth over his glistening glans. ‘Wrap your lips around the head and cover your teeth—then go down as far as you can go without gagging.’

Something in the way he spoke—something in the way she was made—brought her lips obediently around the most pleasureful part of his body, her tongue licking over it lovingly, tasting the salty flavour of his body’s natural lubricant, drawing. ‘Sweet Nimüe!’ from him before she slid her lips down his shaft. His cock was broad, stretching her lips wider as she went down on him, and she imagined the hard length sliding into her quim, spreading her, filling her, using her for his pleasure. The thought wrung a groan from her, deep in her throat, and the sound seemed to vibrate down his cock, summoning an answering groan from him, his hands tightening in her hair. She had feared he might force her down, hold her when she didn’t want to be held, but he seemed content to thread his fingers through the curls.

She felt the rounded tip of his cock at the back of her throat, and she stopped, mindful of his instructions not to gag. He seemed to know she had reached her depth, for he gave her hair a gentle pull up.

‘Now up and down a bit,’ he said, and she complied, grateful that he had not pushed farther than she had been willing to go.

She bobbed her head slowly up and down, feeling the slick length sliding between her lips, and she delighted in the sigh of appreciation he uttered just before beginning to slowly move with her. Remembering more of what she had read, Hermione continued her movement and added periodic swirls of her tongue, which was apparently a good notion.

‘Oh, fuck,’ he moaned, rolling his hips again, slightly changing the angle of his cock in her mouth. ‘I’m fucking your mouth, little one—are you a good girl?’

Hermione hummed to hear this encomium from him—how long had it been since she had earned a ‘good girl’? It seemed an eternity!—and he really seemed to like the humming. His fingertips massaged her scalp, and he growled, ‘Don’t stop what you’re doing.’

So even though her jaw was beginning to tire and her neck was protesting the movements, Hermione hummed on, concentrating on her professor’s breathing and the movements of his body as he luxuriated in sensation, using her mouth and tongue. All that mattered was that she was providing for him what he had provided for her more times than she could count.

Then suddenly, he jerked her head up, disengaging her lips from his cock with an audible pop, and he cried out as a hot spurt of white fluid gushed from him, spattering onto his belly and his pants and his trousers and his shirt as Hermione watched, more proud than she had ever been. She leaned close to inspect the semen and his sated cock, which was growing slowly less firm. She glanced up at him to find him watching her with indulgence, amusement, and some other unreadable emotion on his face.
‘May I taste it?’ she asked.

‘Of course,’ he answered, and she lapped at the sticky puddle near his navel, tracing her tongue through the black hair.

It was quite salty and already cool, not unlike the secretions of lubricant she had tasted on him earlier. His hand released her hair and dipped into the viscous stuff, presenting the finger for her to suck, and as she complied, he spoke again.

‘In fact, it’s good that you asked to taste it, for in time, you will be required to swallow it all, Hermione, as a good submissive should.’

In response, she lowered her open mouth to his belly and sucked the residue from his skin, determined to show him how very badly she wanted to be a good submissive—how desperately she wanted to please him.

‘Fucking hell, girl,’ he growled, and releasing her hair completely, he grasped her upper arms and dragged her into the chair on top of him, kissing her mouth, redolent of his own come. Dragging his mouth from hers, he kissed her throat before murmuring in her ear as his hands roved her body, stroking and squeezing. ‘After that wanton display, my come-hungry little one, if I were your age, I’d have you on the floor, pounding into your hot little cunt.’ He pulled back from her, looking into her face. ‘But I’m shattered,’ he admitted. ‘I haven’t slept much this past week. I propose we move this soiree to the bed and sleep before I fuck you, good and proper—what do you say?’

Before she could help herself, Hermione blurted, ‘But what about my detention?’

He looked momentarily stricken, as if remembering the actions which he had come to feel were inexcusable—then he tenderly cupped her cheek. ‘I’m everything they say about me, Hermione—a petty prick and a greasy git—but even so, I hit a new low in treating you as I did.’ He stroked his thumb over her lower lip. ‘You have no zeroes in Potions class, and the newt intestines have already been sorted.’

Hermione realised she had heard the closest he would come to an apology. Content with that, she closed her eyes and parted her lips, laving the pad of his thumb before gently closing her teeth on it. ‘So,’ she said, releasing his thumb, ‘I don’t have detention, I can spend the night with you, and in the morning, we’re going to make love?’

One black eyebrow arched. ‘Do you find that to be an acceptable plan? Within reason?’

‘Oh yes,’ she sighed, ‘only …’

He stroked a hand over her knee and up her thigh to where the suspenders clipped onto her stockings. ‘Only …’ he prompted.

‘Only I got rather aroused sucking your cock,’ she admitted.

His hand continued past the edge of her stockings, caressing bare skin up to the elastic of her knickers. ‘Only you’re hot and wet and need to come?’ he suggested, slipping the tip of one finger beneath the leg elastic.

Hermione arched toward the hand just beyond the reach of her quim. ‘Please,’ she whispered.
‘Oh,’ he murmured, ‘good girl. It pleases me when you beg to come, little one.’

‘Please sir,’ she pleaded spreading her thighs wider. ‘I’ll do anything you say—anything you want—just please touch me.’

He cupped her quim through the thin knickers. ‘Touch you where?’ he asked, his voice low and silky and utterly intoxicating.

‘Finger my cunt,’ she babbled, pressing against his hand and twisting her torso to kiss his throat. ‘Make me come. Make me come!’

And his hand was beneath her short skirt, slipping down her underpants from the top, curling his fingers into her slick heat and rubbing her clitoris in a circular motion. ‘Tell me what you need,’ he demanded.

‘Oh, God, I need to come,’ she whimpered, reduced to a puddle of incoherence beneath his hand.

‘Who owns your orgasms?’ he hissed, thrusting two fingers inside of her.

‘You do!’ she gasped, feeling the wave rising higher and higher as if controlled by his voice.

‘Then come for me, Hermione,’ he commanded, and the wave crested and fell, drowning her in a flood of sensation which began at the epicentre of her quim and spread through her body in ever widening circles, bringing her nipples to aching peaks and leaving her with limbs so tingly that she was not sure she would be able to stand.

He held her to his heart, kissing her lips, twining tongues with her, and caressing her until she was drowsy. Then he put her from his lap, did up his trousers, and led her past a disapproving portrait of Salazar Slytherin to his quarters, and thence to his bed.
Chapter 29: Completion

For The Potions Master’s Amusement

Chapter 29: Completion

The first thing of which Hermione became aware was that she was sleeping in her clothes—and that she was dead uncomfortable. She shifted to one side beneath the bedclothes, but the stockings on her legs were twisted, and the clips on the suspenders dug into her flesh. With a protesting snort, she pushed the covers away and opened her eyes—and knew she wasn’t in her own bed. Memories from the night before flooded her mind, and she rolled over, but the other pillow was unoccupied.

She pushed out of the bed, straightening the twisted stockings first, then smoothing her hands over her crumpled dress. She looked about the professor’s bedroom, wondering where he was. Didn’t they have an appointment this morning? She saw that the bathroom door was open, so he wasn’t in there—he must have gone to breakfast. Feeling a stab of sharp disappointment, she went into the lavatory to tidy up a bit.

When she went into the professor’s small sitting room, she was foolishly relieved to find him sitting at his ease in an armchair, his long black hair still wet from the shower. He put aside the book he was reading when she entered, his dark eyes intent upon her face.

‘Good morning,’ he said.

Hermione hesitated, uncertain of her status. Did he expect her to uncover her nether parts? Was she supposed to kneel? She didn’t know.

‘I thought …’ she began, but she felt inexplicably shy and could not speak the words in her mind.

‘Yes,’ he said, apparently aware of her concerns. ‘We were not, however, taking all factors into consideration when we made our plans last night.’ One corner of his mouth quirked up. ‘Your classmates are at breakfast. They’re leaving for the holiday, and I am sure they are wondering where you are.’ The other side of his mouth curved as well, and Hermione felt herself melting in response to one of her professor’s rare, genuine smiles. ‘Little though we might wish to think on it, we will not be alone in the castle for the next three weeks, Hermione. It will be necessary for both of us to make appearances at meals and for you to spend time in your dormitory.’

He rose and closed the distance between them, pulling her against him. Hermione wrapped her arms around him, clinging, and he nuzzled her cheek.

‘As much as I would like to spend the day in my bed with you,’ he said, the timbre of his voice so full of promise that she felt her knees weaken, ‘we must play our parts. Come to me after dinner, and the evening will be ours. The password for my chambers is “hairbrush”. We will not stand on ceremony tonight.’ He released her, tilting her chin so that their eyes met. ‘Do you have any questions?’
‘No,’ she said. ‘But I wish I didn’t have to go.’

He swooped on her, catching her up into his arms and kissing her mouth, hot, passionate, and demanding. When he released her lips, she trembled against him.

‘I wish you didn’t have to go, too,’ he said rather gruffly. ‘Now, go.’

Under the Disillusionment Charm, Hermione returned to her dormitory and changed into jeans and a jumper, not taking time to bathe. She hurried down to the Great Hall and slipped into her place between Harry and Ron, conscious of the black-robed Professor Snape watching her from the staff table.

Harry seemed surprised to see her. ‘Ginny knocked on your door, but you didn’t answer,’ he said.

‘Sorry,’ she replied, reflecting that, as usual, her professor had been quite right. They would have to keep up appearances, or there would be too many uncomfortable things to attempt to explain. ‘I was catching a bit of early reading in the library, and the time got away from me.’

Ron turned a look of amused exasperation on her. ‘It’s the bloody first day of hols,’ he informed her. ‘Why weren’t you having a lie-in and goofing off?’

The rest of the conversation proceeded as it had done innumerable times before. Hermione put food on her plate and ate it, knowing she would be held accountable for following prior instructions, such as eating regular meals and reporting them, regardless of how much unholy excitement she might be feeling when contemplating the coming night. She couldn’t help frequent glances at the teachers’ table, and she wasn’t surprised to find the object of her fascination watching her rather more often than not.

Most of her friends finished eating and returned to their dormitories to finish packing while Hermione lingered over her breakfast. When she began hearing the sounds of students clattering across the entrance hall with their trunks, she went up to Gryffindor Tower and performed her prefect duties, making sure everyone got out the door with their trunks and travelling cases in time to make the eleven o’clock departure of the Hogwarts Express from Hogsmeade.

She arrived in the Great Hall for lunch armed with a heavy book of theoretical magic, a subject which fascinated her but which was not taught in secondary school. Happily, she settled down to eat her chicken pie and read for pleasure. There were few students remaining behind for the hols; perhaps ten total, with only two other Gryffindors, a pair of third-year boys who sat together, obviously great friends. Hermione noted that the other students were from Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff; there was not one student from Slytherin House remaining at Hogwarts for Christmas.

She glanced frequently to the head table, hoping to catch a glimpse of Professor Snape, but she did not see him. Perhaps he was taking his lunch in his rooms—or perhaps he had gone into Hogsmeade to eat lunch at the pub. Perhaps he was meeting Taffy Smith …

Her lips thinned, and she gave her head a firm shake. She wouldn’t think about that—not now. Tonight, she would finally be with him—completely with him—and it would be …

She actually shivered with a sudden, aching need for her Dominant low in her belly. With one last
glance at the staff table, she abandoned her lunch and headed back to her dormitory, in sudden need of rest and repose. She wanted to be well rested for the most important night of her life.

Hermione was not surprised when the professor’s office door opened to admit her before she raised her hand to try the knob, nor when the hidden study door illuminated and opened, as well. The study, the room wherein she had spent so many delicious hours, was dimly lit, but she navigated it easily to stand before the portrait of Salazar Slytherin.

‘Hairbrush,’ she said, her voice soft but definite in the silence.

The founder scowled but made no comment as the painting swung forward, and she was admitted to the professor’s quarters. It seemed, for a moment, that the stars of the night sky had descended to hover in the air of the sitting room, for every surface was covered by tiny pinpoints of light. Reason promptly informed her that she was amidst a plethora of tea-lights, and she was touched by the sheer romanticism of the gesture—then she saw him, standing in the middle of the room, waiting for her. He wore a loose-fitting white shirt and dark trousers, and the pride in his bearing drew a sigh of breathless admiration from her. Her groundless concerns—that he would not be here, that he would change his mind, that he would send her away—disappeared when he extended a hand. She went to him immediately, unhesitating, and stopped when he took her shoulders, holding her at arms’ length.

‘Hello, Hermione,’ he said, looking down into her face.

‘Hello, sir,’ she responded, knowing her smile did not match his sober, questioning expression, but she was unable to help herself.

‘You understand that you do not have to do this?’ he said.

‘Yes, I understand,’ she answered. She was sorry that he felt the need to hear the answers to these questions, but she could sense his restraint like a palpable thing, holding him in check as with bands of iron.

‘You may change your mind with no negative consequences,’ he added, his baritone slightly strangled, as if his words were forced past a physical barrier of some sort.

Hermione placed the flats of her palms against his chest and felt the muscles there jump beneath her hands. ‘Please take me to your bed and fuck me, sir,’ she said, looking up into his face, fearless and sure. ‘I’ve wanted it for so long.’

The hands on her shoulders tightened imperceptibly, and then he was in her mind, his passage as slick as his fingers sliding into her needful quim and his presence every bit as welcome. Consciously, she opened her mind to him, allowing him to bathe in knowledge of her utter desire to be his in every way. Time stopped, and she was conscious of his immersion in her thoughts and emotions. She surrendered to his probing, feeling his ubiquity and embracing it. His occupancy within her mind was scarcely less arousing to her than his hands upon her body, and she was soon quivering beneath his examination of her mind, her quim warm and wet with desire, her nipples aching for his attention.

Without disengaging, his hands slid down from her shoulders, and he scooped her into his arms, carrying her effortlessly into the next room, where he deposited her on the edge of his bed. His lips did not move, yet it seemed as if she heard his voice murmuring in her ear as his fingers found the
buttons of her blouse, deftly unbuttoning her. _Lovely_, it said caressingly, and he unfastened her bra, dropping the garments to the floor, before reaching for the zip on her skirt. He tugged and she lifted her bum, allowing him to pull the skirt over her head. His eyes dropped to her knicker-less mound, with the suspenders extending down her thighs to hold her stockings in place. _Good girl_, she heard, and he shrugged out of his shirt. Hermione scarcely had time to preen herself for dressing in a way that he found pleasing before he was bare-chested before her. Her tongue darted out to moisten her lips as she allowed herself to stare at the muscular definition of his toned pectorals. He was rather narrow-chested, as compared to some men—Viktor, for instance—but his upper body was pleasingly fit, lightly toned, and to Hermione, mouth-wateringly beautiful.

_Silly girl_, she heard, but he did not sound angry. Instead, he sounded startled. She raised her face to his and saw a red splotch high on his cheekbones. Had she embarrassed him?

But before she could explore that notion, he grabbed her hands and placed them upon his belt buckle. _Focus_, he said, and though she sensed he was covering his earlier confusion, she was only too willing to be distracted by the insistent bulge beneath her hands. Quickly, she disengaged his leather belt and unfastened his trousers, prepared to lift his pants out and down—but he wore none. Either side of the trousers sagged open, and she was treated to the sight of the dark line which ran down from his navel to the thick growth of black hair which covered his groin. And thrusting from the centre of wiry black hair was his cock, swelling even as she watched.

With a primal impetus which took her completely unawares, Hermione pushed the trousers down his legs, scarcely noting how he stepped out of them, for she had grasped the cheeks of his bottom in her hands and fastened her lips around the slightly protruding tip of his cock, her tongue sweeping gently over the opening at the very end.

‘Sweet Jesus,’ she heard, and was pleased to know she had shocked him out of the link he had sustained with her mind, even as she mourned his sudden absence from her head. Still, his groan of pleasure empowered her to grasp his member just below the knob, sliding the skin down, fully exposing his most sensitive part to her loving administration of tongue therapy.

He allowed her to carry on for only a very short period of time before he removed himself from her mouth. Hermione looked up at his face. ‘No?’ she asked.

‘No,’ he answered firmly, motioning her to the middle of the bed. ‘I have every intention of coming inside you for the first time tonight—isn’t that what you want?’

Hermione scuttled back to the middle of the bed and held out her arms to him. ‘Yes,’ she said fiercely, and he smirked, climbing onto the bed and pursuing her with a lithe single-mindedness which made her heart race. He was so intense, so very sure of himself—somehow, this felt nothing like her amatory adventures with her previous partners—and she was more thankful than she could say.

‘Spread your legs, little one,’ he commanded, on his knees between her thighs, his bobbing erection holding her gaze like a threat and a promise, all rolled into one.

Hermione did as she was bid, feeling the cool air touch her fevered nether parts as she stretched herself open for his inspection. She watched him as his eyes slid up her torso to her breasts, then to her face.

‘I’m going to fuck you, Hermione,’ he told her, his glittering black eyes absorbing her from his place between her parted thighs. ‘I’m going to slide inside your body, and lay on top of you, pinning you
to my bed. I’m going to fuck you so slowly and so thoroughly that you’ll realise you’ve never really been fucked before. And before we’re finished, you’re going to come like the Hogwarts express.’ He reached down, without looking away from her face, and by feel alone, he slipped two fingers unerringly into her slick channel, then spread the moisture he found there up to her clitoris, drawing a moan from her. ‘Do you believe me?’ he asked her, rubbing her clitoris in a circular motion, using the exact amount of pressure to provide the most pleasure.

‘Yes,’ she gasped, grinding against his hand, inviting more caresses from him. ‘I believe everything you say.’

He growled and grasped her hips, jerking her upward, moving forward as he did so, supporting her hips and lower back on his chest as he advanced, and in short order, Hermione had no choice but to hook her knees over his shoulders as he buried his nose in the muff of her pubic hair.

‘But first,’ he said, licking at her moist folds teasingly, ‘I’m going to lick your slick little cunt, because I can’t get enough of the taste of you.’ And suitting action to words, he nudged the bud of her pleasure centre with the tip of his nose while he slurped and licked at her wet opening, liberally covering the lower half of his face with her secretions.

At first, Hermione was discomfited by her position, remembering her mother lying on the floor with her bum supported by her hands in the air as she ‘bicycled’ her exercises. Soon, however, the reality of her professor’s mouth on her quim overruled her self-consciousness, and she simply allowed herself to experience the pleasure, wondering if he was going to bring her to orgasm before he fucked her. Wouldn’t that make it more difficult for her to climax during intercourse?

Then he was unhooking her legs, pushing them up and to one side, allowing her body to rest again upon the bed, even as he moved alongside her. ‘You think entirely too much,’ he informed her, gently pinching a nipple and watching her mouth sag open in response. ‘Don’t think,’ he said, rising over her, until his face was mere millimetres from hers. ‘Simply feel—feel our bodies reacting to one another.’ He kissed her mouth with sudden urgency, his hand rolling each nipple before stroking down her tummy to cup her quim.

Hermione sucked greedily at his tongue, tasting her own quim in his mouth, her hands caressing his back, feeling the supple movement of his musculature as he shifted to cover her body with his. Mindful of his instructions, she simply felt him atop her, the rough hair of his chest and belly scraping over the skin of her torso. She parted her legs to accommodate him, the silky stockings smoothing over his hips and along his upper thighs.

He released her mouth and raised himself to nuzzle between her breasts. Dimly remembering a request he had made before, she pushed her breasts together, offering them to him.

‘Beautiful,’ he said gruffly, his frequently vicious mouth closing over her areola, his teeth lightly scraping before he suckled, his hips shifting, rubbing the length of his considerable erection along the silky stockings, bringing another growl from him. He shifted seamlessly to the other breast, light teething before insistent suckling, and Hermione simply felt, her arousal increasing as she watched his intense concentration, eyes closed, inky black hair sliding over her skin as he nibbled, licked, and sucked her nipples.

Then he shifted himself, supporting his weight on his arms as he manoeuvred his hips against hers, the tip of his cock pushing against her labia. He looked down into her face, his lips twisting, almost as if in pain.
‘Do you want this?’ he demanded, his voice roughening even as the head of his cock slid against her clitoris for the first time, causing her to cry out and dig her fingers into his back, hips jerking up.

‘Yes, yes!’ she insisted. ‘Please!’

His left hand snaked between their bodies, positioning him surely at her entrance. ‘You’re mine,’ he said, thrusting himself inside her body even as he slipped again into her mind, possessing himself of her body and her mind in one motion.

Hermione sucked in her breath, surprised by the sensation of having her professor’s cock inside of her. It was not painful, but was quite alien, feeling quite different from her toys or …

*Focus*, the commanding voice directed, and she pulled herself together, looking trustingly up into his face, automatically relaxing muscles that had been tensing in reaction to the unfamiliar length and breadth of him demanding entrance to her body. *Good girl.*

Consciously, Hermione took a deep breath, further relaxing, feeling him sliding further in, until his scrotum rested on the flesh of her bottom, and with a grunt, he rotated his hips, creating a sensation that brought Hermione’s head up, her lips in an ‘o’ of combined surprise and pleasure.

*Mine*, sounded in her mind, reverberating as well in her body, and he withdrew, pulling out, sliding along the path created to cause the most exquisite friction for them both. Hermione let out a sigh, her hands running down his flanks, admiring his lean grace as he moved over her body, his face contorted in pleasure.

Slowly, maddeningly, he moved in and out of her body, watching her face and knowing her thoughts as she had them, in complete control of the act taking place between them. As he had said it would, the passage of his ridged cock in and out of her cunt, spreading her, massaging back and forth over her clitoris, was building a slow, consuming burning in her blood, creating sensations unlike anything she had ever felt before. She was torn between wishing he would move more quickly and wishing it would never end, going up another notch of passion with every impact of his heavy scrotum against her bottom, which would signal another rotation of his hips and a more pronounced sneer on his lips.

She felt the urge to toss her head upon the pillow, but she had no desire to lose eye contact with him, so she simply breathed more deeply, allowing him in farther still, knowing he was as far into her body as he could go, but wondering if there was an end to how much of her mind he could possess.

*As much as you allow*, she heard, as he ended another deep stroke into her body. He snapped his hips, impacting a spot inside which he had tapped before with his fingertips—but this was completely different, for he was filling her, spreading her, *fucking* her, and she nearly came off the bed with a loud cry. But of course, she couldn’t, for he was pinning her to the mattress, just as he had said he would, and she was utterly in his power.

*Yes*, his voice hissed in her mind, and he gritted his teeth. *At my mercy.*

And he jerked his hips again, wringing a feral cry from her, her fingernails digging into his back. ‘Please!’ she cried, not knowing what she wanted him to do, exactly, only having faith that he would know what to do—that he would do what she needed.

Almost imperceptibly, he began to move more quickly, sweat beading on his forehead as he laboured over her body. His eyes flicked from her face to her swaying breasts to the spot where their bodies
met. Still, he was in her mind, somehow caressing her thoughts even as he fucked her cunt, inciting the fire in her blood to spread to her muscles, an escalating inferno racing along her nerve endings, speeding to a destination both familiar and strange.

_Trust_, his voice said. _Trust me._

‘Master,’ she breathed, reaching for him with her entire being, and she could feel the shock of recognition as he heard her both with his ears and in his mind. Somehow, _she_ was in _his_ consciousness, possessing him as he possessed her, and the reality of his awareness was intoxicating. After a moment’s hesitation, he enveloped her completely, and in that instant she knew he had wanted her—_wanted this_—since the night he had pushed her to the floor in the kitchen on Grimmauld Place and straddled her body.

His reaction to her discovery was visceral. With a sudden release of control, he allowed himself to plunge in and out of her body with abandon. Both excited and alarmed, in seconds she felt her body slipping and sliding along a slope of sensation so intense she couldn’t consciously keep up.

_Let go!_ the imperative commanded, the voice she heard even in her dreams, and she obeyed, her climax blazing through her. Feeling as if her cognizance had slipped the bounds of time, she hurtled headlong into space, yet safe in the arms—and the consciousness—of her professor.

‘Mine!’ he roared, but Hermione, adrift as she was, could not be sure if he had spoken the word or merely thought it. He was stiffening above her, gasps of completion tingeing the edges of her awareness, even as her corporeal body cradled his, her arms and legs wrapping around him, holding him to her, her anchor and her reason.
Hermione woke in the utter darkness feeling the wiry hair of a man’s chest at her back, a hand upon her shoulder, and hearing a voice—the voice—speaking just above her right ear.

‘Wake up, Hermione,’ Professor Snape commanded, his warm breath fanning over her cheek.

‘What is it?’ she asked, her heart racing. ‘What’s wrong?’

Abruptly, the candles were lit, and Professor Snape rolled away from her. Hermione squinted at her wristwatch and saw it was after two o’clock in the morning. Was he going to send her back to her room? She rolled onto her back and saw that he had climbed out of the bed and was now standing between her and the bathroom. He was dressed again, wearing his loose-fitting white shirt and black trousers above long, narrow bare feet. She blinked at him, confused.

‘If you need the lavatory, I would like for you to use it now,’ he said evenly.

Hermione sat up, clutching the sheet to her chest. Where was her considerate lover from just hours before? Where was the nearly romantic Severus Snape who had covered his sitting room with star-like tea lights?

‘Am I going back to my room now?’ she asked, feeling let-down at the mere thought.

‘Not unless you choose to do so,’ he replied silkily. ‘I am not nearly finished with you yet.’

Hermione saw the purposeful way he was watching her, and a completely new sensation of pleasurable anticipation fluttered inside. ‘Oh!’ she murmured, throwing the covers from her body. ‘Then I’ll just go in here …’

She rose from the bed and passed by him with a tiny glance at his face. His eyes were narrowed speculatively, and he raked them down her naked form as she hurried to the bathroom. She washed her hands when she was done and splashed water on her face. How odd that he had woken and dressed—if they were going to have sex again, why had he put on clothes?

Finally, she emerged again into his bedroom, which was now brightly lit. He stood in the middle of the empty space between the bed and the wardrobe. Hermione approached him, stretching her hands to him as she neared, but his hands continued to hang by his sides. Slightly abashed, she lowered her hands again and stopped before him.

‘It would be appropriate for you to assume the submissive’s pose now, Hermione,’ he said quietly.

There was no hint of reprimand in his tone, but Hermione felt a stab of panic, nonetheless. She had
gone to bed with her lover and woken up with her Dominant. The changes confused her and kept her off balance. Silently, she assumed the pose and stared at the rug upon which she knelt, forcing herself to breathe slowly, in and out. She had no idea what his plans for her were, and she might need her energy before the night was out. She would do best to stop trying to second-guess him and simply accept what was to come.

For several minutes, Professor Snape remained in place; Hermione knew, for his toes were within her peripheral vision. But then he moved, and her personal radar told her that he was circling her kneeling figure. She continued to breathe deeply and slowly, willing herself to relax and accept what was next to come, whatever it might be.

Hermione was beginning to feel the weave of the rug as a discomfort to her knees and the fronts of her calves before Professor Snape spoke again.

‘A submissive in training to serve me would become … intimate with nipple clamping devices.’ His voice came from behind her, low-pitched and grave, as if discussing very serious business. ‘My submissive would become accustomed to having her nipples tormented and pleasured in this way,’ he added.

Hermione quailed inwardly. Clamps? On her nipples? Dear Merlin, she wasn’t sure she could abide the pain. Surely it would hurt, terribly!

He paced around her left side, stopping with his toes clearly visible before her bent knees. ‘Do you trust me to give you pleasurable pain, Hermione?’ he asked, his voice warm now, almost inviting. ‘Will you submit to my will and consent to wear the nipple clamps?’

Oh, God, when he put it like that, how did she dare to refuse him? Besides, she did trust him. He had never led her wrong, had he?

‘Yes, sir,’ she said softly.

He squatted down before her and tilted her chin until she looked into his face. ‘Thank you, Hermione,’ he said solemnly. ‘That pleases me.’

She smiled and the corners of his eyes crinkled, though his thin lips did not curve. Then he stood.

‘Come with me, then,’ he said, and as she scrambled to her feet, he led the way to the bed, where he seated himself against the headboard and motioned her to sit beside him.

When she was settled, he reached into his trousers pocket, and Hermione stiffened, expecting him to extract some medieval-looking torture device—but it was only the black silk cloth which had served as her blindfold in the past.

‘I would like for you to wear the blindfold, so that you might concentrate on the sensations rather than the mechanics of the operation—but if you prefer to be able to see what I am doing, I will not require you to wear it.’

Hermione didn’t hesitate. ‘I’d like the blindfold, please,’ she said, and she turned so that he might tie it over her eyes.

Reduced now to sound and sensation, she rested again with her back against the headboard, conscious of his movement on the bed. Next his voice came from in front of her, very close.
’Because this is your very first time, I will not ask you to wear the clamps for very long,’ he informed her, gently stroking her right breast as he spoke to her. ’The sensation will be quite intense, and you may at first perceive the intensity as pain.’ Now he fondled her nipple, rolling it and gently tugging, and arousal began to lick along the edges of her consciousness. ’It is my conviction that you will love the clamps on your nipples—that in time, you will beg for them—but if you sincerely believe the discomfort is too extreme, you may ask me to remove them, and I will do so.’

Hermione squirmed a bit as he continued to play with her breasts, now moving to the other, pulling on the nipple until it was pebbled and taut. ’Will you be angry if I ask you to take them off?’ she asked.

’I will be disappointed,’ he admitted, never ceasing to pinch and roll her nipples, ‘but I will never be angry if you ask me to stop doing something when we are playing our sexual games, little one. Everything that happens between us will be consensual.’ Now both hands plucked at her nipples, making her quim slick and hot with want. His lips found hers, and he tongued her mouth as he pulled at her nipples, wringing a moan from her. ’Ready?’ he asked.

Hermione shifted on the bedclothes, suddenly wanting him hard and insistent between her thighs. ’Yes,’ she said pressing her aching quim against the sheets. ’I’m ready.’

He moved swiftly, taking her already hardened nipple between his fingers and sliding a heavy, cold metal contraption in place of his fingers. The sensation was quite alien, but in seconds the metal above and below her flesh began to move toward one another, tightening over her very sensitive body part.

’Breathe through your mouth,’ he advised, as the metal continued to tighten until she thought her flesh must be mashed beyond recognition. ’You’re doing very well,’ he added, and the praise steadied her.

The pain was like a bright light behind the blindfold, burning, stinging, and hurting. Yet unbelievably, his deft, sure hands were reaching to her other breast to repeat the process. No! No, she couldn’t bear it! But she didn’t speak, simply panting through her open lips, bearing the pain for him—because he asked her to. There was a reason for it, she well knew. He wouldn’t ask, otherwise.

The cold metal bars caught above and below her other nipple and began the inexorable movement toward one another, catching her nipple between them, squeezing, squeezing. And cold upon her midriff, she felt metal which seemed to be pulling, increasing the pressure on her nipple. Now the pressure on the second nipple had ceased to increase; it was perfectly matched to the pain on the other side. Hermione was completely still, fearful that her slightest movement would increase the pain, making it unbearable for her and forcing her into the ignominious position of asking her professor—Master! her subconscious insisted—to desist what he had termed their ‘playing’.

A sudden, feather-light tug was exerted on the clamps, pulling on her tormented nipples, and Hermione gasped aloud. Dear Merlin, the heavy, cold thing on her midriff was a metal chain, linking the clamps together! He was pulling on it!

She parted her lips to protest, but his voice, vibrant with meaning, silenced her. ’Exquisite,’ he breathed, and his lips claimed hers again, his tongue invading her mouth and caressing her tongue, even as his fingers invaded her quim to pleasure her clitoris.
Hermione fisted her professor’s shirt in her hands, afraid to hug him, lest his chest come into contact with hers. The intense, burning pain in her nipples was beginning to confuse her, for as her mouth and cunt were pleasured by familiar, time proven methods, the discomfort to her breasts was somehow increasing the pleasurable sensation of the other stimuli, as small amounts of alcohol will interact with a narcotic painkiller to make one particularly giddy and drunk. Now, when he tugged lightly upon the chain, pulling on her clamped nipples, Hermione groaned with pleasure, humping desperately against the fingers in her quim, seeking more sensation, more pleasure.

Her professor laid a trail of scorching kisses from her lips to her throat, biting her, surely marking her, before his teeth closed on her earlobe. ‘You are never more beautiful to me than when you submit to pain for my pleasure, little one. Does it please you to make me happy?’

‘God, yes,’ Hermione moaned, exhilarated beyond coherent speech by his praise, grinding herself unashamedly against the fingers in her cunt.

‘Good girl,’ he purred. ‘Now the clamps are going to come off, and there will be a rush of very intense sensation. Are you ready?’

Hermione nodded once and almost immediately felt his hands at her breasts.

‘Now,’ he said, and the clamps were gone, but the blood which had been denied access to her nipples rushed back all at once, stinging mightily and drawing a gasp of dismay from her.

There was a sound, as of metal on wood, and then she was grasped and dragged across his lap, so that she straddled his hips, facing him. His hands upon her flesh were gently reassuring, and his mouth found her poor, abused nipple, laving it reverently with his tongue before repeating the process on the other side. Hermione found the gentle warmth of his mouth comforting to the sore tissue. ‘I have an oil which will help with the soreness,’ he said, and he began to trace his fingertips over her areolas and nipples, coating them with a warm, slick salve.

His hands were in her hair then, and the blindfold was removed from her eyes. Hermione blinked owlishly at the light, then focussed on his glittering black eyes.

‘You did very well,’ he told her seriously.

Hermione looked down at her chest, but her nipples looked no different to her, save for the gooey ointment on them. ‘How long did I wear the clamps?’ she asked curiously. ‘It seemed like a really long time.’

‘Fifteen minutes is the maximum amount a time a submissive should wear nipple clamps,’ he explained, ‘and then, only when they have built up to it.’ His fingers threaded in the hair at the nape of her neck and he compelled her to kiss him, his free hand delving between the lips of her labia to caress her quim. Then he pulled her back from him, guiding her movement by the hand in her hair. ‘You wore them for five full minutes,’ he told her. ‘You should be proud. I believe you even reacted to the pleasure stimulus, which is quite rare for a novice.’

Hermione flushed with gratification, feeling herself aglow with satisfaction that she had earned praise from him. ‘It seemed much longer,’ she admitted.

The fingers in her cunt stilled, and he placed both hands chastely at her hips.

‘You have earned a reward,’ he informed her. ‘You may either curl up and go back to sleep, or you
may take my cock out and ride it.’

Hermione’s fingers were at his fly before the last word was out of his mouth, and he chuckled appreciatively.

‘Eager little slut,’ he purred, and she got his fly undone and pulled him out, glad to see he had once again left off underpants.

Looking down between their bodies, she lovingly stroked his erection, sliding the foreskin down and wondering about the logistics of fucking in this position.

‘Start to lower yourself, as if you were going to sit on my thighs,’ he instructed. ‘I’ll help you guide it inside.’

Biting her lip with determination, Hermione lowered herself slowly, and as she did so, her professor shifted slightly below her, redirecting the angle of his shaft before using the hand at her hip to force her down and onto him.

‘Oh,’ she said, startled as before by the way he filled her, and keeping a firm grip on her hips, he thrust up with a grunt of satisfaction.

‘Fuck me,’ he ordered her, his half-lidded eyes blazing with sudden intensity.

Feeling a bit awkward and unsure of herself, Hermione moved up and down on the cock piercing her, wondering how to rise up without having it fall out of her. How long would she be able to rise up and down before her legs were too tired for her to continue?

‘Stop thinking,’ he snapped irritably. ‘Just do it.’

And so she did, concentrating on establishing and maintaining some sort of rhythm. By her third time up and down his cock, he had joined in her motions, thrusting up to meet her, helping guide her movements with his hands at her waist, the pronounced sneer upon his lips informing her that he was enjoying himself. She stroked his face, her fingers tracing the shape of his beautifully formed lips, until he leaned forward and kissed her, their rhythm slowing to a more leisurely pace as their tongues thrust and parried. His hands stroked her torso, cupping her breasts while avoiding her nipples, then sliding down and around to her bum, grasping her cheeks and thrusting up even as it seemed his tongue would touch her tonsils.

He ended the kiss, encouraging her without words to resume her previous rhythm of riding up and down his erection. He looked into her eyes and thrust his fingers in his mouth, then reached between them and began to rub her clitoris.

Hermione’s pleasure quotient quadrupled at this stimulation, and each upward thrust of the shaft she rode nudged the spiralling rapture higher. Dear Merlin it was good to bob up and down on the professor’s hard cock, but it was a much more difficult position from which to achieve orgasm—and she desperately, desperately wanted to come. She steadied herself with her hands on her professor’s shoulders, staring into his sexy, sneering face, reaching for the golden peak just beyond her grasp.

‘Come for me,’ he urged his voice low and gravelly. ‘Feel my fingers on your clit—feel my prick up your cunt—look into my face and see how aroused I am by you.’
Hermione looked down between their bodies, saw where they were joined, and they she dragged her eyes back to his face, seeing how his glances moved from her eyes to her lips to her bouncing breasts and back again. At that instant, he plucked at her clitoris, and she felt herself begin to unravel.

The orgasm seemed to come from within her very core, excited beyond the point of rationality by the friction of their bodies, gathering force as it moved through her body, drawing a shout from her throat of sounds made unintelligible by bliss. She was distantly aware of her professor immobilising her hips and driving upward in a pistoning motion before his own release, hot within her body.

Hermione felt inert and did not protest when Professor Snape shifted her onto her pillow and stood to shed his shirt and trousers. The stunning afterglow of their lovemaking shaved away every restraint, and she reached her arms for him, wanting to feel his long, wiry body beside hers, wishing to find to way to be inside his skin with him as the waves of contentment eddied around them.

She held out her arms to him, and after a moment’s pause, he responded to her unspoken invitation. She knew the look on his face when he paused had been significant, but she was too happy to reason out what emotion had passed over his famously inexpressive countenance. Instead, she gloried in the possessive way he pulled her against him and murmured, ‘My perfect pet.’

Then his non-verbal spell extinguished the candles, and she listened to his strong, steady heartbeat as she drifted again into sleep.
Sunday afternoon found Hermione in the library, her revision materials open before her and her mind far away from her studies. To her frustration, she had found virtually nothing on the shelves of the Hogwarts library concerning sexual practices outside the norm. There were references to ‘deviance’ and ‘fetish’ but no very specific explanations of either of these terms. How was she supposed to educate herself in this field of study if no materials were available to her?

With her quill, she began to sketch the clamps her Dominant had used on nipples in the wee hours of the morning. She had seen them when she woke up, discarded upon the bedside tabletop. She was glad, in retrospect, that she had accepted the blindfold. If she had seen the clamps beforehand, she might not have had the courage to submit to their use … and to be honest, it had been quite a turn-on. Somehow, the pain of the clamps had intensified the pleasurable feelings in her quim. What did that say about her?

And what did it say about him?

She dropped her quill and frowned at her parchment. She knew what it meant. It sexually excited Severus Snape to hurt her. No, that wasn’t quite right. She had been watching him verbally flaying her classmates since she was eleven years old, and there had never been a hint of enjoyment in his demeanour. It was her consent that sealed the deal for her professor—her desire to experience the pain he offered, in conjunction with the pleasure. He was a sadist, but he was also a Master, whose chief motivation was the domination and control of his submissive.

A shaft of pure desire pierced her, and her mood swung abruptly to near giddiness. The very idea of her Dominant spending his time thinking of things to do to her—planning their encounters—left her breathless. She should also be thinking and planning how she could please and amaze him, but she didn’t have enough information. Hadn’t her professor told her that he had other books for her to read after she finished reading Master Maximus’ and t’s book, The Sensuous Symmetry of Submission?

Suddenly in a hurry, she shoved her books into her bag and set out for the dungeons. Perhaps she could obtain permission to read the book this afternoon in her professor’s study—and who knew what wonderful things might happen afterwards?

She entered his study with her skirt lifted, her nether parts naked to his eye. He sat at the table, an array of odd-looking objects laid out before him on a white towel. He rubbed at one of the unidentifiable items with a rag, and a strong smell of disinfectant, such as Hermione had smelled in Muggle hospitals, was in the air.

What in the world was he doing?
‘Good afternoon, Hermione,’ he said, still concentrating on his work. ‘Have you completed your revising for today, then?’

Hermione shifted uncomfortably, conscious of her utter failure to accomplish any studying thus far today. ‘I want to study more about Dominance and submission, sir,’ she said truthfully.

His head swivelled in her direction, one coal black eyebrow arching. ‘Has D/s been added to the NEWT curriculum while I wasn’t looking?’ he inquired sardonically.

‘No, of course not,’ she admitted. ‘But I’m well ahead of schedule on my studies in my NEWT classes—and I can’t stop thinking about …’

‘Come here,’ he said.

She crossed to him. ‘May I undress?’ she asked.

He studied her before speaking. ‘I would like to be able to say, you may always undress in this room, but there are situations and circumstances under which it would not be appropriate. You may, however, undress now.’

Hermione made quick work of it, placing her discarded skirt, bra, and jumper on the floor behind her. She knelt at his feet, feeling a strange sense of pride as she did so. She was permitted to kneel for him as was no one else. He was her Master. He hadn’t said so, but oh, please Nimüe, let it be so!

‘Come,’ he said, ‘show me your breasts.’

Hermione stood again, leaning forward slightly to bring her breasts closer to his face. He studied them with clinical interest.

‘Are they sore?’ he asked, his eyes flicking to her face.

‘No more than when you’ve sucked them for a long time,’ she answered.

‘But what an excellent notion,’ he said and pulled her onto his lap, burying his nose between her breasts, startling a laugh from her.

He latched onto a nipple, his lips about her areola as his tongue laved and probed. Hermione smiled, lacing fingers in his hair, and he began to suck, the insistent tug upon her nipple stoking the embers of arousal which seemed ever ready to flare into fire. After giving considerable attention to one breast, he switched to the other, seemingly content to hold her in his lap on this winter afternoon and drive her crazy with want. She shifted slightly with a murmur of arousal, and his half-lidded eyes, like liquid pools of ebony, rose to her face.

‘Yes?’ he asked.

Hermione felt nonplussed. How was it that he, who seemed to know every thought that flickered across her mind, could not know what his attentions were doing to her? ‘Nothing,’ she whispered.

Professor Snape frowned. ‘Hermione, when I ask a question, I expect an answer. I do not speak simply to hear the sound of my own voice.’

She flushed. ‘But … sir, surely you know I’m aroused by what you’re doing?’
His eyebrows arched. ‘Of course I know.’

Hermione swallowed, wondering why he was being so difficult. ‘Well, I was only reacting to what you were doing. I didn’t mean to interrupt you.’

He studied her face, the silence serving only to make her more discomfited than before.

‘Hermione, are you under the impression that every sexual encounter between us should end in orgasm for you?’ he asked neutrally.

Hermione bit her lip and averted her eyes. Well, if she was under that impression, wasn’t it because they had usually ended that way? What did he want her to say? ‘No,’ she said finally.

‘But …?’ he prodded.

She looked up again and smiled. ‘But I wish every encounter could end with orgasm for us both,’ she admitted.

His eyes seemed to smile, although his lips did not curve. ‘A submissive is not always permitted gratification of her desire to come,’ he admonished. ‘There are Masters far more strict than I, who permit far fewer orgasms.’

Hermione felt the discomfort in her tummy that she experienced every time he spoke of her in conjunction with ‘other Masters’. ‘I’m sorry,’ she said.

‘Very well,’ he replied, his posture changing with his mood.

Hermione glanced about for a change of subject and her eye fell on the assortment of implements on the table. ‘What are these things, sir?’

He urged her off his lap, and she regained her feet. He picked up the object he had been handling before. It was made of a black, shiny substance, not unlike vinyl. The shape was a conical tapered length, ending with a significantly flared bottom. There were two other near-identical items lined up on the towel, each slightly longer and thicker than the one preceding it.

‘These things?’ he said, flicking the smallest with a negligent finger. ‘They’re yours, Hermione.’

Hers? Why did she not find that reassuring? ‘M-mine?’ she stammered.

‘Certainly,’ he purred, watching her face. ‘Part of your training—I purchased them just for you. I was giving them a good cleaning before we begin to use them.’

‘But what are they for?’ she asked again. She could only think of one use for something of that particular shape …

‘They’re butt plugs, if you’ll pardon the expression,’ he answered. ‘The purpose of the device is to slowly, over time, stretch and relax the muscles of your anus to allow for your arse to be fucked.’

Hermione retreated one step in horror. ‘Sir! You don’t … don’t want to fuck me—’ she couldn’t bring herself to say it ‘there, do you?’
He watched her impassively. ‘It is not my preferred activity, but I would be remiss in your training if I were not to prepare you for it, Hermione. Many Masters enjoy anal intercourse on a regular basis, and for you to be properly trained, you must be acquainted with it.’

Hermione staggered back another step. ‘But I don’t care about other Masters!’ she cried, tears starting to her eyes. ‘I only care about serving you! And if you don’t care for it, I don’t care for it!’ She fell to her knees, feeling her tears begin to fall in the same instant. ‘Please,’ she said, hearing the break in her voice and unable to stop it, ‘please don’t make me do it. I s-said “yes” to the clamps, didn’t I? Do I have to do everything all at once?’ Now she was crying in earnest, unsure of how they had gone so quickly from nipple-sucking pleasure to the threat of terrifying anal intercourse.

She remained where she was, sobbing at his feet, and for several minutes he did not move or speak. At last, he stood and scooped her up, carrying her to the sofa and placing her on the floor, between his knees.

‘Accio Hermione’s hairbrush,’ he said, and when it had zoomed into his hand, he passed her a clean white handkerchief.

Hermione mopped up her face, feeling the soothing motions as her professor began brushing her hair. With infinite patience, he created order from chaos, and after a time, he spoke while he brushed.

‘I would like to point out, Hermione, that your visit this afternoon was unscheduled,’ he said.

‘Oh!’ she said, turning her head to apologise, but he firmly directed her face to the front again and continued to brush.

‘You’ll note I did not say it was unwelcome,’ he added rather acerbically. ‘Simply unexpected. And if you had not asked about the plugs, I would not have broached the subject with you today.’

Hermione felt the combination of his hair-brushing and his voice like a Calming Draught; before she knew what she was about, she was clinging to one long leg, her cheek pressed blissfully to his inner thigh.

‘Please keep in mind that it is my duty, as your Dominant, to push your boundaries—to assist you to find your true limits—and because you are a novice, it behoves me to introduce you to many different D/s practices, not just the ones of most interest to me.’

The brush made the journey from the top of her head to the middle of her back, the flat of his free hand following in its path, smoothing her bushy hair.

‘We will not begin anal training today,’ he informed her, ‘but we will discuss it again, in greater detail and at length, at some future date. Do you agree, Hermione?’

‘Yes,’ she responded, lulled and soothed by his tender attentions. It wouldn’t be so horrible to discuss it with him, would it?

At the sound of her voice, the brushing ceased. ‘Then are you ready for your spanking?’

Hermione turned to look at him. ‘Am I in trouble?’

He looked steadily into her eyes. ‘Certainly not. But you are in need of discipline, are you not?’
Hermione felt weak at her very core. How did he know these things about her? Without speaking, she placed her hands upon his thighs and pushed herself to a standing position, then stretched across his lap. His hand, firm and reassuring, rested first upon the back of her lower leg, then stroked up to her bum before repeating the process with the other leg.

‘Who knows what you need?’ he asked.

‘You do, sir,’ she said.

‘That’s right,’ he replied, and the back of her hairbrush impacted her bottom, drawing a cry from her lips.

Oh, it had been too long since she had been spanked!

Her professor seemed to realise this as well, for he went about his business with the concentrated intensity he brought to his most lascivious acts upon her body, and Hermione gave herself over to the cleansing effects of a good spanking. As ever, he placed his strikes carefully, never in the same place consecutively, and built up both speed and force incrementally, until Hermione sobbed unashamedly into the sofa cushion, a clean, empty vessel.

He stopped striking her and lightly caressed the inflamed tissue with his fingertips. ‘Such a perfectly reddened bottom,’ he said, slightly out of breath. His hands fumbled at her hip, and she thought he must be straightening himself in his trousers. Then he turned and lifted her until she rested with her back against his chest, her head on his shoulder. He wiped her face with a clean handkerchief before lowering his head and kissing the corner of her mouth. ‘Better?’ he asked.

Hermione smiled at him mistily, and he stroked a hand down her torso, cupping her damp mound. ‘Oh, yes,’ she said. ‘Much.’

‘Good,’ he murmured, and he kissed her mouth while he slipped a finger through her pubic curls and touched her clitoris, drawing a moan from her.

‘Do you know what happens to nasty girls who get wet cunts when their professors spank their naughty bottoms?’ he asked her, curling two fingers down to enter her body.

Hermione ground against his hand. ‘Something wonderful,’ she gasped, wriggling her bottom—but something was wrong. She was feeling flesh, not fabric, against her bum.

‘We’ll see how wonderful you think it is when I’ve fucked you so hard you can’t walk straight,’ he growled, shifting her weight and reaching between them to situate his cock at her entrance.

‘Oh, please,’ she said, already aflame with passion as she slid down on his shaft.

He didn’t speak, for the logistics of sex from this position seemed to require a great deal of his attention. He held her hips forcefully in one spot as he thrust up into her, and Hermione did not attempt to move, for fear of disengaging the searing connection between their bodies. She knew from his breathing that it required tremendous exertion on his part to impale her from beneath and behind as he was, and when she looked down between her thighs, she saw his thick, glistening cock pumping in and out of her hole. The mere sight increased her excitement, and it seemed as if she felt more intensely each grunting thrust he made into her body.

‘Fucking hell,’ he panted, his voice ragged in her ear, ‘you’re so fucking tight …’
Hermione allowed her head to fall back on his shoulder, giving herself over to the experience of having her Dominant—my Master, her heart insisted—fucking her with such animal abandon.

‘Fucking you,’ he growled, his voice thready, and his hand darted to her sticky wet quim, beginning to rub her clitoris in a deft, circular motion. ‘Sweet Nimüe,’ he breathed, and Hermione didn’t know if he was calling out to the sorceress of old or if he had somehow mistaken Hermione for her, but it didn’t matter, because his ever more insistent caresses were dissolving her. ‘Come for me pet,’ he insisted, his strokes on her clitoris now matching those up into her cunt, ‘come with me!’

His climax began, his language deteriorating even as his thrusts intensified, and Hermione was carried on the tide of his insistence and his passion, crying out her own climax as he spent himself deep in her womb.

He moved her beside him, and then they were stretched out together on the sofa, eye to eye, and she felt as if she breathed his every breath. She kissed his mouth, and he allowed her to do so, gently parrying the thrusts of her tongue.

‘You’re mine,’ she told him, though his eyes were nearly shut as he succumbed to drowsiness.

‘Hmm,’ he replied, cradling her to his heart.

Clinging to him, Hermione listened to his slow, even breaths until she drifted to sleep as well.

When she awoke, he was sitting at the table. There was no sign of the unsavoury butt plugs. Professor Snape had tidied himself, his hair freshly combed, and he now wore the dark green jumper. Hermione stood, clutching around her the blanket with which she had been covered. She saw there was a meal set out on the table; a bowl of thick stew, bread and butter, and a tall glass of milk.

‘Did I sleep through supper?’ she asked, trying not to give in to the alarm licking along her thoughts. Something seemed wrong.

‘Yes,’ he said, not looking up from the green journal in which he was writing. ‘You sent a note to your Head of House letting her know you were having a sandwich in your room.’

Hermione nodded, still standing near the end of the table. ‘Where’s your dinner?’

He finished writing and replaced the cap on his bottle of ink. ‘I will eat while I’m out,’ he said, rising to place his writing things on the nearby bookshelf.

Hermione felt as if she had taken a Bludger to the abdomen. ‘You’re going out?’ she said.

He turned to her, his black eyes snapping. ‘This is Sunday evening, Hermione. You are aware that I go to the village on Sunday evenings.’

Hermione felt her lips tremble. ‘But you said you wouldn’t go to her on nights when you’ve been with me,’ she said.

His lips thinned. ‘Our agreement was that I would not go to the village on Saturday nights, when we
had our standing appointment,’ he pointed out.

‘Please don’t leave me for her,’ she said brokenly, knowing she sounded pathetic but unable to prevent herself from pleading.

‘If you do not wish for me to leave your presence to visit Miss Smith, Hermione, then it will be necessary for you not to come to my study on Sundays,’ he answered tersely.

She approached him, allowing the blanket to fall to the floor, and placed her hands on his arm. ‘I can’t bear to think of you with her,’ she said. She looked pleadingly up into his face. ‘I’m being as straight-forward as I know how to be, sir—it’s torture for me.’

She didn’t speak the invitation, but she felt it as he accepted and slipped into her mind, examining the forefront of her thoughts and emotions. When he disengaged, she sagged against him, bereft by his withdrawal.

He took her arm and propelled her to the chair before the food. Hermione sat, and he tucked the fallen blanket around her as he spoke.

‘I’ve told you before that your impressions of my association with Miss Smith are incorrect,’ he said. ‘We do not engage in sexual congress.’

Hermione glowered at him. ‘Do you “play” with her as you play with me?’

A suddenly implacable look came over his face. ‘I will not discuss Miss Smith with you, Hermione,’ he said, and she could clearly hear the anger underlying his tone. ‘You may eat this food, and if you choose, you may sit in this room and read Master Maximus’ book while I am out. You have my permission to wait up for me to return, if you wish, or you may return to your own room.’

He picked up his cloak, which was draped over the back of a chair, and strode out of the room without another word.

‘Well, fuck a duck,’ Hermione said crossly, taking up her spoon and attacking her bowl of stew as if it had done her some wrong.

And although she finished reading The Sensuous Symmetry of Submission, and the fire in the hearth burned down to mere embers, and Hermione fell asleep on the sofa where he had taken her with animalistic vigour, still Professor Snape did not return.
Hermione stirred, noting the cramp in her neck. She shifted her shoulders, slowly straightening. She had fallen asleep sitting up, and she was sore all through her back. Slowly, she opened her eyes and cried out when she saw the face of a house-elf directly in front of her.

The house-elf jumped back in fright, wringing his hands and speaking in a high-pitched, squeaky voice. ‘Wretch is sorry, Miss!’ he said nervously, twisting his fingers in his Hogwarts tea towel. ‘Professor Snape is saying Miss is to be at breakfast, and breakfast is now.’

Hermione struggled upright, casting off the emerald green blanket which covered her, glad that she had dressed before falling asleep. ‘The professor’s here?’ she asked the elf. ‘Where is he?’

Wretch shook his head. ‘No, Miss—Professor Snape is telling Wretch before. If Miss is not in her room in the morning, Wretch is to tell Miss to go to breakfast.’

Hermione frowned. ‘When did he give you these instructions, Wretch?’

‘At the start of the holiday,’ Wretch explained anxiously. ‘Miss is revising in the professor’s study and might sleep there, sometimes. If the professor is not in, Wretch is to tell Miss to go to breakfast.’

Hermione rubbed her eyes, wishing it all made a bit more sense to her. ‘How do you know when the professor is gone?’ she said.

‘Wretch looks after Professor Snape,’ the house-elf informed her. ‘Wretch knows when the professor is here and when he is gone.’

Hermione stared at the little creature with bleary eyes. It must be some form of house-elf magic, to know when their charges were present or absent. At any rate, she needed to make an appearance at breakfast since she had missed dinner the night before.

‘Thank you, Wretch,’ Hermione said, standing up and slipping her cold feet into her shoes. ‘I’ll go to breakfast, now.’

Wretch bowed very low before Disapparating with a crack. Hermione made her way out of the professor’s study and through his office into the dank corridor. She would wonder later where, exactly, Severus Snape had spent the night and what she could do about it.

The day was interminable. She bathed, napped, notated her journal of the previous night’s food and sleep, and after lunch, at which Professor Snape did not appear, she forced herself to go to the library, where she revised. She concentrated on Defence, knowing it was her weakest subject—but
really, it wasn’t the book learning part in which she was deficient, was it? She had the theory down cold. It was the actual spell-casting in which she fell short of her goals—short of Harry, she acknowledged sourly—and revising wouldn’t improve those skills. Only practice would, and it was so much easier to practice with a partner.

Defensive spells weren’t the only thing that one could practice more effectively with a partner …

She let herself drift into a delightful dream, thinking about the information she had absorbed from *The Sensuous Symmetry of Submission* and how it applied to her and her Dominant. There had been a whole chapter on anal sex. Reading it had made Hermione feel uncomfortable but seeing the illustrations of the horribly-named butt plugs and reading about how they were used to prepare the woman for it had been helpful. Apparently, it was an act of supreme submission, to permit one’s Master to ‘go’ where no one before had been—to allow him to possess her completely, in each of the three available orifices—and certainly, t’s comments about it had mirrored Hermione’s feelings. Master Maximus’ submissive, t, had been repulsed and afraid when first presented with the notion, but she had trusted in her Master, and he had carefully and methodically prepared her for it over a period of time. The description of how it had made t feel to yield to Master Maximus in this way had made Hermione ache to do it, if for no other reason than to prove her desire to submit to her Dominant … to her Master.

But even more than the anal sex, she had found the description of other practices so darkly arousing that the images had peppered her dreams. The notion of placing herself completely in the power of Severus Snape—to allow him to command the details of her daily life, to hold her accountable for obedience, to punish and reward her—simply thinking about such things made her feel weak in the knees. Many of the acts described by t and Master Maximus, Hermione had already experienced to some degree or another—but what would it be like to submit to sustained time periods of instruction and obedience? Would it be for Hermione as it had been for t, that in losing herself in her submission, she would find her true place in the world?

Merlin help her, she wanted to find out. The more she gave, the more she received, and it always and forever left her wanting more.

She arrived in the Great Hall just as dinner was served, but her furtive glance at the head table did not show the presence of her professor. A cold, sick fear gripped her. Had he run off with Taffy Smith, that stupid shop girl? Was he having such a good time fucking the pretty blond woman through the mattress that he couldn’t bother to return to the castle?

Stop it! she chastised herself. *He has said repeatedly that his relationship with her is not sexual.*

Listlessly spooning sprouts onto her plate, her mind raced through other likely explanations for his absence, but only one made sense: Voldemort had called for him.

*Dear God, please don’t let them hurt him,* she thought, dragging her fork through her mashed potatoes in figure-eights. Last time, he had required two days to recover from the madman’s attentions. What if it was worse, this time?

What if he never came back?

Pushing her plate away, she poured a cup of tea instead, sweetening it and adding a splash of milk.
She sipped her tea meditatively, trying to plan for eventualities. Did she dare to ask the Headmaster where Professor Snape was? Would he answer her as an adult—as someone closely associated with the Order of the Phoenix—or as a student? Did she dare to draw attention to herself in relation to her professor?

She glanced back at the staff table, her eyes flitting painfully past the empty chair where Professor Snape usually sat, and she watched Professors Dumbledore and McGonagall conversing soberly. Were they wondering the same thing she was? Wondering where their Potions master had got himself off to?

Resolutely, she drained her teacup and pushed it from her. She would not approach the other professors with her question—not yet. It would not do to betray too much interest in the Potions master’s whereabouts. It would be better to bide her time and hope for the best.

She spent a restless night in her room at the top of Gryffindor Tower, trying to read, but with eyes wandering persistently to the window, watching, ever watching, for her professor to return. She longed for him, wherever he had been, to return, so that she might see his face and hear his voice.

At last, she gave in and lay down upon her bed fully dressed, drifting off into uneasy sleep filled with incoherent dreams. When she heard the urgent voice, she thought it was a dream, as well.

‘Miss! Wake up!’

Hermione’s eyes opened, and in the firelight, she saw Wretch the house-elf standing by her bed, his tea towel covered in blackish paint. She struggled to make sense of his presence.

‘Is it time for breakfast?’ she asked muzzily.

‘Professor Snape is needing Miss,’ Wretch said urgently. ‘Miss is to come with Wretch right now!’

Hermione struggled into a sitting position. ‘Where is he?’ she asked, her heart suddenly galloping in her chest.

‘Professor Snape is in his rooms, Miss,’ Wretch said, fidgeting. ‘Please to come now!’

Hermione swung her feet over the bedside and stuffed them into trainers, then she was on her feet and heading for her door. A cold, spindly-fingered hand closed over the arm of her jumper.

‘It is faster if Miss comes with Wretch,’ the house-elf said.

‘How?’ Hermione asked, but before she understood what was happening, she heard a loud crack and was in the suffocating blackness of Apparition.

When she was steady again on her feet, she opened her eyes to see that she was standing in Professor Snape’s bedroom, every candle in the room lit, flooding the room with light. Wretch released her arm, and looking down at him, she could now see that his tea towel was not splashed with black paint, but was covered in a dark red, glistening substance that looked very much like …

She spun around and saw Professor Snape sprawled on his bed, his face streaked with blood, his torn
jumper saturated with it.

‘Sir!’ she cried, hurrying to him.

He opened his eyes at the sound of her voice, and he spoke in a strained tone. ‘You did well, Wretch. You may go.’

The house-elf did not squabble but popped out of sight, and Hermione was left alone with her professor. His overly bright eyes fastened on her face. ‘Will you help me?’ he rasped.

Hermione did not answer but ran to the bathroom, murmuring the password to open the snake painting, behind which the potions cupboard lay. She grabbed potions from the shelves and ran back to him.

‘I’ve brought Blood-Replenishing Potion, Soulagement for pain, and the one for internal injuries,’ she said.

‘No internal injuries,’ he told her. ‘All external, this time around.’ His lip twisted in the parody of a smile, and Hermione’s heart was wrenched.

‘Let me help you!’ she cried, leaning forward to smooth his matted hair from his sweaty forehead. ‘Which one first?’

‘Blood-Replenishing,’ he said and opened his lips to swallow the liquid she poured into his mouth. ‘Now Soulagement,’ he said, ‘but only half the phial—I don’t want to sleep.’

Hermione administered half the phial, then recapped it and watched as pain relief leached some of the strain from her professor’s face. ‘Now what?’ she asked, glancing down fearfully at the blood-soaked jumper.

‘Shower,’ he croaked, struggling to sit up.

‘Oh, sir!’ she cried, torn between helping him up and pushing him back down. ‘Don’t you think you should stay in bed?’

He shook his head, and his stringy, dirty hair whipped from side to side. ‘Have to wash off the blood,’ he managed, ‘so we can see to heal the wound.’

Determinedly, he gained his feet, and when he swayed, Hermione stepped close and wrapped her arm about his waist, supporting him. This close to him, the coppery smell of the blood was horrible, and her stomach clenched.

‘Can’t I just do a Cleansing Spell?’ she asked, sagging under his weight as he tried to take a step.

‘This is better,’ he insisted.

‘Fine,’ she muttered, keeping comments about stubborn men to herself. With her free hand, she drew her wand and said, ‘Locomotor professor!’

He lifted a few inches from the floor, and Hermione grasped him firmly about the waist and guided him into the bathroom, ordering him to duck his head as they passed through the doorway. She was startled when he chuckled—she had been a bit afraid he would be angry about the indignity, but it
was the only way she could think of to move him by herself!

‘Clever girl,’ he said as she began to unfasten his belt and tug his trousers and pants off, quickly followed by his socks. ‘I’ve never been moved like a piece of furniture before.’

Hermione stared at the ruined jumper, knowing she couldn’t reach high enough to pull it over his head. With a wave of her wand, she Vanished the bloody garment, and found herself staring at the gaping wound just below his ribs on the right side of his body.

‘Don’t swoon,’ he snapped irritably, and Hermione shifted her gaze to his face, surprised that he was alert enough to be aware of her reactions.

‘Of course not,’ she answered briskly, and she gently propelled him into the shower stall, surprised but gratified to see a bench built into the tiled wall. ‘Perfect,’ she murmured, and releasing the spell, she seated him on the bench and reached for the taps.

‘Perfect for blow jobs in the shower,’ he informed her, and she turned to look over her shoulder, a laugh startled from her by this playful display. ‘Aren’t you going to take your clothes off first?’ he added. ‘No point in getting them wet, is there?’

She turned, hands on her hips, and gave him a severe frown. ‘I don’t think you’re as incapacitated as you were pretending to be,’ she said.

He responded with a smirk. ‘The pain potion took the edge off,’ he admitted. ‘Come here and I’ll undress you.’

But Hermione was already pulling off her clothes and throwing them out of the stall onto the floor. When she was completely naked, she turned back to the taps and took the first spray of cold water on her body, protecting him from it and shielding him until the water was perfectly warm. When she was satisfied with the temperature, she twisted the showerhead so the water would fall on him, and taking up his soap, she approached him.

He sat quiescent in the warm water spray, allowing the water to rinse the caked blood from his face and his torso. She knelt before him, washing his feet and lower legs as the streaming water worked on the parts of his body which had been injured. She watched him closely, worried that he might fall asleep, but the gentle movement of his fingers upon her shoulders reassured her. She rubbed the soap over his thighs, her hands spreading the aromatic lather over the long, lean muscles there. He sighed audibly, widening the vee of his legs, and Hermione rubbed the bubbles into the shock of wiry black hair covering his scrotum, surprised but pleased to see his cock stirring.

Stop it! she scolded herself. He’s injured—he’s not himself—you have no business molesting him when he’s at a disadvantage!

Yet it seemed that her professor did not share her scruples, for he directed her soapy hands to his stiffening penis, and when she had begun to wash it, his eyes opened, the glittering black irises indistinguishable from the pupils.

‘You’ll want to make sure it’s clean and rinsed properly,’ he said, his fingers trailing down to pinch her nipples. ‘You won’t want soap in your mouth when you suck me off and swallow my come.’

Her quim throbbed in response to his words, the devilish fingers plucking at her nipples undoubtedly adding to her confusion, but she made an attempt to stay on topic. ‘Sir—shouldn’t we get you clean
and back into bed, so I can heal your wound?'

He thrust up through the slick hands now rinsing the soap from his groin. ‘We’ll do that, Hermione—after I come in your mouth.’ He stared down into her face, a sneer upon his lips. ‘Don’t you want me to fuck your mouth, pet?’

Hermione felt her resolve melting. He was sitting down, wasn’t he? Surely he could come to no harm—and sweet Merlin, she wanted to taste him again. His thickening, lengthening member bobbed now in front of her face, begging her attention.

‘That’s right,’ he murmured, and she looked up to see him watching her. ‘When you look at my cock and lick your lips like that, little one …’

Hermione dipped her head and closed her lips around the knob of his prick, her tongue swirling.

‘Fuck,’ he swore, and his hands gripped her breasts convulsively, closing over the softness with a groan.

Hermione slid her mouth down his length, careful with the teeth, trying to remember the things she had done the first time, which had gone remarkably well. He was less controlled this time, his movements jerkier and more forceful, but his enjoyment was vocal and loud. She felt like a goddess, conferring favour and pleasure upon an adherent, and at the same time, like a worshipper at the shrine of her own idolatry. His cock seemed bigger, somehow, than it had done before, and she wondered if that was because he was thrusting more, harder, his fingers twining in her hair. She realised he was exerting more pressure on her head than the last time, and she knew a moment of panic as she felt him impact the back of her throat.

Concentrate! she reminded herself. Making a deliberate effort to relax her muscles, she focussed her attention on his hip movement and the noises emanating from him—pleasureful and quite loud. She found it difficult to remember everything she had read about how to properly suck a penis, intent as she was on preventing the gag reflex from triggering, but her professor seemed no less pleased than he had done before.

He began to speak, then, his voice nearly guttural in his extremity. ‘You’re amazing,’ he said, his panting breaths all but robbing him of the ability to speak. ‘Prepare yourself,’ he gasped, and then the salty, hot liquid flooded her mouth. He thrust once, twice, thrice more, each more shallow than the last, until he was still.

Hermione knew she had not swallowed all of the ejaculate; it had run down his cock, soaking into the pubic hair, only to be washed away by the cascading shower. Even so, she had managed some, she had not gagged or retched, and he was caressing her now with terrific tenderness.

When he released her hair, she slowly raised her face from his groin, looking up into his eyes, but they were closed. On his lips was a smile.

‘Sir?’ she said worriedly, reaching for his face.

‘I’m fine,’ he said lazily. ‘Just shattered, is all.’ His eyes opened. ‘Could you finish washing me up?’

Very carefully, Hermione complied with his request, taking extra care with his torso. The wound on his abdomen was four inches long and rather deep. It was clean, now, but still bleeding in a sluggish way. She stood and took his shampoo from the shelf. As she washed his hair, she ascertained that the
blood on his face had come from superficial scratches. He all but purred beneath her hands as she
massaged his scalp, and she looked down into his blissful countenance, wondering what sort of fight
he had been through, that this was his condition afterwards.

When she was sure she had rinsed his hair completely, she turned off the water and stepped out of
the shower enclosure to procure a towel. ‘Do you need the toilet?’ she asked. ‘If not, may I levitate
you to the bed?’

When she had him dry and supine, she took up her wand, looking doubtfully at the wound. ‘Let me
call Madam Pomfrey,’ she said nervously.

He was all but asleep, but he managed a snort. ‘I’d like to see you explain what you were doing in
my rooms,’ he said.

‘Don’t laugh!’ she protested. ‘I’ve never tried to heal a wound this big. I may not get it right.’

He shook his head once. ‘Nonsense. I’ve never seen you fail to perform a spell properly.’

Hermione felt her cheeks flush with pleasure. Even so, she said playfully, ‘Flattery will get you
nowhere, sir.’

He laughed softly but seemed too sleepy to reply. Gathering her confidence, Hermione raised her
wand and began to sing the spell, tracing about the edges of the wound, then back and forth, as if
encouraging the skin to knit again. When it looked as if the skin had grown back, she applied the
dittany.

By the time she was satisfied with her work, he was deeply asleep. She covered him with the
bedclothes, then crawled in with him, curling up at his side. When they woke up, she would ask him
where he had been and how he had been injured—but for now, she allowed herself to join him in
sleep.
Chapter 33: The Offer

Author's notes:

A/N: Of course, when Severus said in the last chapter that no one had ever moved him like a piece of furniture, he didn’t know how Sirius moved him along the tunnel beneath the Whomping Willow, with his head bumping the roof …

For the Potions Master’s Amusement

Chapter 33: The Offer

She floated in a haze of titillation, pleasure flooding her synapses, drawing murmurs of arousal from her lips. Her breasts were being caressed, pinched, licked, suckled, and her quim was a morass of heat and need. She arched into the hands upon her body, squirming, wanting, and slowly, she awoke, realizing that it was not a dream: Someone was making love to her.

Eyes open, she was met with the impenetrable darkness she associated with Professor Snape’s dungeon quarters. Yes, now she remembered. She was sleeping in his bed, and he was caressing her.

‘Hello,’ she said, stroking his hair.
He answered by exerting more pressure on the nipple he was suckling, a growl of pleasure accompanying this vocalisation.

‘Are you feeling better, then?’ she asked, concerned.

‘Shut up, or I shall gag you,’ he sniped, and she was happy to comply.

In the velvet dark, he pleasured her for an immeasurable time, his lips and hands at her breasts, his hair brushing over her flesh as he moved his head. She endured in a heightened state of arousal, moving her hips as close to his body as she could manage, desperate for his touch on her quim. He seemed unaware of her need, his leisurely enjoyment of her breasts sufficient for his wants.

With a bit of desperation, she began to caress his face, his arms and shoulders, all of him she could reach. She was half out of her mind with need for him to touch her there, and it seemed to her as if he was taking much too long to get there.

Suddenly, his lips left her nipple and his hands grasped her arms, pushing them up over her head with an impatient utterance. She felt the familiar, welcome touch of the silken scarves at her wrists, and his voice was in her ear.

‘Yield,’ he breathed. ‘Yield to me, pet.’

_Of course_, she thought. She had been trying to direct their interaction, forgetting, as she was wont to do, that in this bed, it was not her place to do so. ‘Yes, sir,’ she whispered.

And laying down her will, she submitted to his exquisite caresses, allowing herself once again to float along in the wake of the sensations pouring over her body, as she had done when she was sleeping. There was no need to act, no need to think, no need to decide what she ought to do. In this place, at this time, it was her part to receive what she was given, and that was her only task.

At last, his hand stroked slowly down her body, over her ribcage, one finger dipping enticingly into her navel, then he cupped her mons, giving it a squeeze.
‘Do you want to come, little one?’ he asked, his breath fanning over her face.

She smelled toothpaste and realised he had risen and cleaned his teeth while she slept. ‘Yes, please,’ she said, raising her hips beneath his hand. ‘I want to come so badly.’

His lips found hers, and as his tongue teased into her mouth, his fingers mimicked his actions below, tickling over her aching clitoris.

‘You’ve been such a good girl,’ he said, the tip of his rapier tongue tracing the shell of her ear. ‘No one could have asked for a more helpful partner than you proved to be tonight, Hermione. Thank you.’

Then his lips closed over hers again, no longer teasing, but in dead earnest. He kissed her with a single-minded passion she had never encountered in him before, his two long fingers thrusting inside her body as his thumb surely circled her pleasure centre. Hermione sucked greedily at his tongue, absorbing his attentions like a sponge, her legs splayed open obscenely to facilitate his ministrations. In all too short a time, she cried out, the sound muffled by his tongue in her mouth. Then her arms were released and he had pulled her into a crushing embrace, cradling her as the excess of stimulation overcame her sensibilities, and she cried into his neck, clinging to him weakly.

He held her against his too thin body, murmuring comforting noises, one large hand stroking her hair, over and over. When she was quiet, he shifted so that they lay face-to-face, and the candles were lit. She blinked, and he watched her intently.

‘I believe you had some questions,’ he said neutrally.

Hermione smiled and stroked her fingertips over his beard stubbled cheek. Questions? Had she wanted to ask him about something? It felt as if her brain had been turned to mush. ‘What time is it?’ she asked, failing to remember anything else she wanted to know.

He snorted. ‘Are you sure you want to use your period of free questions for such twaddle?’ he asked. Nevertheless, he twisted away from her briefly to consult the clock. ‘It’s half-five,’ he informed her.
As Hermione’s eyes accustomed to the dim light, her brain seemed to kick back into gear. ‘Did Miss Smith give you these injuries?’ she inquired, her fingertip tracing the outline of the scar on his abdomen.

His lips twisted, as if he might chuckle. ‘Hardly,’ he said. ‘My appointment with Miss Smith was interrupted by the Dark Lord’s summons.’ His expression darkened.

‘Did … did he hurt you?’ Hermione asked.

‘Not this time,’ her professor answered. His voice was rather terse, but he did nothing to discourage her from continuing to ask questions.

‘Will you tell me how you were injured?’ she asked diffidently, watching his face closely.

‘My presence was required for a planning session,’ he said. ‘The Dark Lord is of the opinion that his Death Eaters can no longer be spared for such trivialities as serving time in prison. Four of them were being held at the Ministry of Magic; the others are in Azkaban.’

Hermione frowned. ‘You said four were being held at the Ministry … are they no longer there?’

Her professor grimaced and indicated the wound scar, which was healing nicely. ‘Avery’s Blasting Curse was rather poorly concentrated,’ he said bitterly. ‘A rather large chunk of rock caught me there.’ He shook his head. ‘Travers, who was in the holding cell, was struck in the head by flying debris; he may not recover. Perhaps next time, the Dark Lord will listen to my suggestion of how to go about it.’

Hermione swallowed, her mind awhirl. She knew this man, her Dominant—my Master, her heart insisted—was a Death Eater, acting upon the Headmaster’s orders, pretending to be loyal to Voldemort while acting as Dumbledore’s spy. But he helped Death Eaters escape from Magical Law Enforcement? How could he?

‘Are you sorry you asked?’ he said quietly.
Hermione looked into his face, seeing the expression there, somewhere between fear and resignation. What was he expecting from her? ‘No, I’m not sorry,’ she said. ‘I wanted to know.’

The professor pushed himself into a sitting position, propped against the headboard. ‘Hermione,’ he said gravely, ‘I think we both know this—’ he motioned between them ‘is a bad idea. I ought never to have permitted it to begin. In another time and place, it might have been appropriate, but with the war looming …’

Hermione watched him fearfully, terror immobilising her, so that she looked up at him from her pillow. Dear Merlin, why did she have to love him so? The emotion was so big it felt as if it were impeding her ability to breathe. ‘Are you sorry?’ she asked in a small voice.

His eyes warmed as he watched her. ‘I cannot be sorry,’ he admitted. ‘Training you has been a joy—a bright spot in an otherwise dreary existence.’ He reached down to stroke her cheek, and she closed her eyes beneath his touch. ‘The war is imminent, pet,’ he said, and the intimacy of his tone emboldened her to scramble up and wrap her arms about his torso, burying her face in his shoulder. ‘It is possible that at any time going forward, I will be required to leave Hogwarts—to declare myself in the eyes of the world as the Dark Lord’s adherent—and when that happens, I will be forced to leave you behind.’

Hermione clung to him and nodded her head. ‘I understand that,’ she said against his throat, her voice muffled.

‘If you were wise,’ he said flatly, ‘you would renounce your association with me. The memory of this would give you some measure of protection from the Dark Lord.’

Hermione did not trust herself to speak but shook her head violently.

He spoke now coaxingly. ‘I would still write your letter of introduction to the D/s community in London,’ he said, ‘and provide you with a letter of recommendation, as well.’

Hermione pulled away from him, hurt morphing into anger. ‘I don’t care about your bloody letters!’ she cried. ‘I offered myself to you! That is all I care about. If we must be apart, then that’s what happens to people in wartime! But don’t talk to me about renouncing you!’ She stopped, sucking in great draughts of air, feeling as if she were breathing properly for the first time since their
conversation had begun. The emotion in her had not dissipated nor been diminished in any way by his words. It roiled in her like a storm at high tide, crashing about, pushing words from her that might better have been left unspoken. ‘I can’t leave you,’ she said flatly, looking straight into his glittering black eyes. ‘I am not capable of it. I would appreciate it if you would do me the courtesy of not suggesting it again.’ She straightened her shoulders, her knowledge of her power in their relationship gathering about her like a shield. ‘If you send me away, there is nothing I can do about that. Are you?’

He did not hesitate. His head shook once in the negative, the loose hair about his face swaying with the motion. ‘I have made myself responsible for your well-being,’ he replied. ‘I do not make that commitment lightly.’

For the first time in their association, Hermione was the first to turn away. She slipped out of the bed and began to dress.

‘You’re leaving?’ he asked.

‘I want to shower and change before breakfast,’ she answered, doing up the zip on her jeans. ‘What are your plans for today?’ she inquired.

He did not immediately answer, and she turned to face him. He was watching her, his beautifully formed lips pressed into a tight line. Hermione shoved her bra into her pocket and pulled her jumper over her head, wondering if he was going to speak. It felt so alien to voluntarily leave his presence, but it was time for her to underline her autonomy—for him to see the possibility of her choosing to walk away from him.

Professor Snape rose from the bed, his lean, hard-used body naked in the December cold of the dungeon chamber. ‘You made an offer to me, Hermione—an offer of your submission. Have you had second thoughts about that?’

Hermione looked fearlessly into his hawk-like face. ‘I have been trying to make it clear to you that I have had no second thoughts,’ she said evenly.

He stepped closer to her, his cock, which had been hard against her thigh as he finger fucked her quim, only half subsided. She smelled her secretions on the fingers which gripped her shoulders. ‘Your instructions are to carefully reconsider your offer to me,’ he said, sounding as if he were
giving her a class assignment. ‘You will not touch yourself sexually until I give you explicit permission to do so.’

Hermione nodded, schooling her expression not to give away the wild, exultant pounding of her heart in her chest.

‘I will be away today—I have to visit Diagon Alley and take care of my seasonal purchases. You are to write three thousand words on the subject of the official offer of submission between a submissive and her Master.’

Hermione felt the thrill quiver through her body as he spoke that word, and she was unable to suppress the slight shudder which accompanied it.

‘Tomorrow night, Christmas Eve, you are invited to my study to spend time with me. The evening’s activities will be up to you. If you wish, at that time, you may initiate the ritual to offer your submission. If you prefer, we may pass the time in the mutually enjoyable activity of your choice.’

Hermione realised she had stopped breathing, and she forced herself to inhale. Then she licked her very dry lips before saying, ‘And if I make my offer of submission? Will you accept it?’

He ran the pad of his thumb over her lower lip. ‘I would not allow you to initiate the ritual, otherwise,’ he said huskily.

‘Why can’t we do it now?’ she asked, suddenly afraid that he would change his mind.

One corner of his lips quirked up. ‘Thirty-six hours of careful consideration, sexual abstinence, and the writing of three thousand words on the subject will be accomplished in the meantime. Those are my terms, Hermione.’

‘Then I accept your terms,’ she said with great dignity, struggling to contain the great swell of joy burgeoning in her heart.
He took her hand, and in an oddly courtly gesture for a naked man with half an erection bobbing between them, he kissed her fingers. ‘Until tomorrow night,’ he murmured.

Hermione hurried from his quarters, erupting into the dungeon corridor with a crow of joy which greatly startled the Bloody Baron, whose sharp reprimand was entirely lost on the jubilant girl who all but skipped away.
Hermione walked down the snowy High Street, her thoughts far away. Professors McGonagall and Sprout were in the Three Broomsticks, having warm drinks after completing their last-minute holiday shopping. Hermione had begged off, claiming to have one more thing to pick up, and now she had to figure out what that ‘one more thing’ was going to be.

How in the world did one choose a Christmas gift for one’s Dominant? What would he want? Still puzzling over her dilemma, she stepped into Gladrags, her eyes sweeping over the offerings for men. She knew he liked jumpers—she had seen him wear a number of different ones—but what would he think of receiving a gift of clothing from her? Would it be presumptuous?

Wandering into a row of jumpers in every colour, she reached for one in a soft, flat black. The jumper was woven from the softest wool; she could not resist the urge to bury her face in it. She could easily imagine the fabric saturated by her professor’s signature scent. With a happy sigh, she reached for the price tag.

Her jaw dropped. Fifty Galleons? Fifty? Hermione put it back on the shelf. She didn’t have fifty Galleons to spend. Disconsolately, she searched through the other jumpers. She found one in Slytherin green for ten Galleons, which would clean out her purse of any remaining funds, but the wool seemed rough and scratchy—it was clearly inferior to the black one. Dissatisfied, she returned the green jumper to its place.

Back out on the High Street, she considered her options. She could buy a book for him, but how could she possibly choose something he would like? Surely any books on Potions he would already have acquired for himself, and she had not yet had the leisure to examine his personal book collection to determine his tastes. She could give him a book she loved, but she quailed from the notion. What if he despised her taste? She stood before the window of the small book store, staring in at the display of seasonal books. It was saddening to realise that she loved Severus Snape with all of her being and yet did not know him well enough to so much as choose a trifling book for him to enjoy in his leisure time. It was a disconcerting realisation.

She wanted to give herself to him, body and soul; she trusted him with every fibre of her being. But what did she really know about him?

She turned from the book store display, noting that the thirty minute time limit imposed by Professor McGonagall was nearly over. Rushing back toward the pub, she passed Scrivenshaft’s. On impulse, she darted inside. Perhaps she could procure a nice quill for him. Everyone needed a new quill, didn’t they?

A display of brightly feathered quills caught her eye, and she was drawn to it. Amongst the scarlets, turquoises, and chartreuses, she found a glistening, blue-black raven feather quill. The feather was
perfect, the barbs sleek and pristine—and precisely the colour of her professor’s hair, when clean. And directly beside the feather was a small box of writing parchment, edged in darkest forest green. She could easily see her professor sitting down to his table and using this beautiful quill to write a letter to a friend or family member upon the elegant writing paper.

‘Can I wrap those up for you, miss?’ a round little wizard with rosy cheeks inquired.

Hermione turned to him with a smile so radiant the small man could only smile back. ‘Yes!’ she said happily. ‘I’ll have the raven quill and a box of the writing parchment, please.’

She paid the seven Galleons, eight Sickles, and fourteen Knuts and hurried away to join up with her companions.

That night, Hermione watched for Professor Snape at dinner, but he did not appear in the Great Hall. Well, if he had shopping to do in Diagon Alley, he might have decided to dine in London—perhaps even to sleep there. She determined that she was not going to worry about him. He had ordered her to ‘reconsider’ her offer of submission. Not necessarily to reach a different conclusion, though she was free to do so if her cogitations led her there—but to consider again, using all of the information available to her, whether she wished to offer her submission to Severus Snape. She had no expectation of reaching a new conclusion, but she had learned from The Sensuous Symmetry of Submission that a submissive ought to take every command of her Dominant—her Master!—very seriously, indeed. It would be blatantly disrespectful to disregard his instructions. Therefore, Hermione would sit down with quill and parchment and use her three thousand word essay as a tool of reconsideration.

After finishing dinner, she retired to her room in Gryffindor Tower. First, she cleared her desk of books and parchment and wrapped Professor Snape’s Christmas gift. That done, she changed into her warmest pyjamas and took up her quill.

It took many hours to complete, but she knew in her heart that it was time well spent. She made a list of the pros and cons of offering her submission to her professor, sorting out her own thoughts in the process. So much of what she felt was bone-deep emotion—it was good discipline to separate reason from feeling. The column of the ‘cons’ seemed mostly to contain things war-related, such as the possibility of them being parted by their individual responsibilities. She was pleased to see that her list of ‘pros’ included such facts as her trust in, her respect for and her desire to serve him.

A huge part of her reason was her love for him. But she knew she could not make it part of her case for becoming his submissive. No mention of love had ever passed his lips, and she was resigned to the reality that it probably never would. She had already learned, however, to rely more on her professor’s actions than his words when it came to expressing emotion.

Late into the night her candle burned as she fastidiously copied out her completed three thousand word essay for Professor Snape. When she finished the last sentence, she put her quill aside and stretched to relieve her cramped muscles. As she reached to close her green journal, his spiky handwriting appeared on the page opposite her last words:

As ever, Hermione, you have written a well thought out defence of your position. Your reasoning is sound. Outstanding work.
In more personal news, I am looking very much forward to our appointment tomorrow evening. Now, sleep—and I wish you sweet, submissive dreams. — SS

Hermione knew nothing, really, of how a submissive was to go about the business of offering her submission to a Dominant. Everything she knew about being a submissive had come from her lessons with Professor Snape and from her reading of Master Maximus’ and t’s book. Thankfully, t had written a full account of her offer of submission; Hermione would go through the same preparations as t had done, and she would go to her professor and initiate the ritual.

She spent a good deal of her day resting and making physical preparations. Before dinner, she removed from her wardrobe the garment she meant to wear down to the dungeons later that night. It was a cloak she had found amongst her mother’s things from university—crushed red velvet with black fur trim. By modern Muggle standards, it was outrageously outré, but by wizarding standards, it was just rather old fashioned. She had brought it to school thinking she might use it for her wrap at a fancy dress party, but now she thought it would be perfect for this particular Christmas Eve.

Professor Snape was present at dinner, the first time she had seen him since the previous morning. Hermione’s breath caught when she spied him at the staff table, dark and disturbing, his expressionless gaze resting upon her for long periods of time. She was far too excited to eat much, but she knew she was being watched, so she made a concerted effort to swallow some shepherd’s pie. When she could bear it no longer, she took a last swallow of pumpkin juice and left the Great Hall to dress for the most solemn occasion of her life.

When she entered his study, just past eight o’clock, he was waiting for her. He sat upon the cobalt blue sofa, magnificent in black trousers and his tight white, high-necked jumper, his freshly washed hair combed back from his face.

‘Good evening, Hermione,’ he said. ‘Come in.’

Leaving her shoes just inside the door, Hermione moved across the room to him, feeling like the proverbial moth drawn to the cataclysmic flame. His eyes never moved from her, glittering in his thin, sallow face. Her legs felt unsteady, her knees trembling as if they might, at any moment, fold beneath her. Still, she held on, stopping before him and standing proudly, enshrouded in fur-trimmed crushed red velvet. Holding his gaze, she unfastened the cloak and let it fall from her body, caressing her skin all the way to the floor.

She had taken pains to saturate her hair with Sleekeazy’s Hair Potion, so that it fell down her back to her shoulder blades. She wore no cosmetics, save for the glossy colour upon her lips, a near match for the cranberry red of the puddled velvet at her feet. Otherwise, she was completely naked, the sleek brown hair upon her head the only hair upon her body. She watched as his super-heated black eyes raked down her body, lingering speculatively upon her hairless cunt before rising again to her face. Still, he did not speak, allowing Hermione to lead their interaction—waiting to see what she would do.

Respectfully, Hermione inclined her head to him, then raised her eyes again. ‘May I speak my mind, sir?’ she asked, echoing the words t had used with her Master.
Professor Snape’s oversized nostrils flared as he inhaled sharply, but his voice betrayed no reaction as he said, ‘You may, indeed.’

In one fluid motion, Hermione knelt at his feet, the nervousness she had felt earlier leaching away as she took him in. His stark, austere features were the ones of which she dreamed; the raven’s wing black of his hair begged her touch; the surprising breadth of his shoulders, tapering to a too-small waist quickened her blood. This man was the one she wanted in life—the one she wanted to please—the one whose hands she wanted on her body, whether in pain or pleasure. She had nothing to fear in what was to come. It was the natural, inevitable conclusion of the journey she had begun months before, in the kitchen at number 12, Grimmauld Place.

She looked up into his beloved face, knowing her eyes were shining with tears and yet uncaring that they might fall. All that mattered was that he hear the words she was going to speak—the only wish of her heart was that he would accept her. In a voice which was resonate with her conviction, she began to speak.

‘Sir, I have experienced your domination. I have been purified by your discipline, nurtured by your supervision, and taken completely beyond myself by your touch. Mindful of all we have discussed on the subject, it is with a full heart that I offer to you my submission.’ Hermione felt a wave of emotion rising in her, making it difficult for her speak. Her professor’s attention remained riveted upon her face as if he were absorbing her words. Swallowing with difficulty, Hermione continued her speech. ‘Severus Snape, I request that you permit me to call you my Master and allow me to yield my will to yours, so long as we both shall wish it.’

They remained as they were for several beats, but Hermione felt no anxiety. The warmth of her professor’s gaze as his eyes rested upon hers caused her heart to turn over in her chest. There was no discomfort, no concern that he might turn her away or somehow deflect her offer. She had the distinct impression that her professor had no desire to rush through this moment, but that he wished to savour it. Hermione was completely content to savour it with him.

When at last he spoke, the silken intimacy of his tone awoke the ache low in her belly, spreading a wakening warmth to her quim.

‘I have experienced your submission,’ he said. ‘You demonstrate a true desire to learn, and as I have told you before, I have never seen a woman more naturally suited to submission than you are. Previously, I agreed to undertake your instruction and to see after your welfare.’ He sat forward slightly now, resting his elbows on his legs. ‘Now, Hermione Granger, I accept your offer of submission. Henceforward, I will be your Master, disciplining and supervising every aspect of your life, at every point seeking to lead you into ever deepening sexual submission, so long as we both shall wish it.’

Hermione felt the moment when the tears flowed over, tracking openly down her cheeks. The very air of the room seemed changed as she breathed it in, for the world had finally come fully right, and Severus Snape had avowed himself her Master.

Without looking away from her, he produced a strip of soft black leather which he draped over his palm and extended for her inspection. One end dangled, a pointed tip with small holes evenly spaced over a two inch length; the other dangling end held a plain silver buckle. Then he turned the strip of leather over on his palm, and she saw the silver disk in its middle, adorned with the simple engraving, SS.
‘Will you wear my collar?’ he asked, his voice gruff with what she easily recognised as emotion.

‘Oh!’ she gasped with a tiny sob. ‘Oh, yes—please!’

He slipped from the sofa and knelt with her, chest to chest, and there was an awkward moment as he placed the collar about her throat, and she lifted her hair to permit him to fasten it. When it was secured, he bent his head to press his lips to the leather, his breath whispering over her skin before he raised his head to look into her face.

‘You do me great honour,’ he said to her. ‘I shall do everything in my power to deserve your trust.’

Hermione’s fingers traced the glory of the collar—her Master’s collar—about her neck, and she smiled at him through her emotional tears. ‘The honour is all mine, Master,’ she said.

And as she spoke his title for the first time, something potent and wild flashed through his eyes. He jerked her against him, his lips crushing hers, tongue thrusting, teeth scraping, almost as if he would consume her. Hermione responded to him joyfully, twining her arms about his neck. Holding her to him firmly with one arm, he lifted his head and wielded his wand with the other, then pushed her gently back, and Hermione found herself reclining on the crushed red velvet cloak.

He remained on his knees, staring at her collared, naked form. ‘You really belong to me now,’ he informed her, a harsh note to his voice. ‘Do you know what that means?’

Knowing it was a rhetorical question, Hermione shook her head once, waiting to hear what he would say.

‘It means that no other man will touch you, my pet—not ever.’

He stood and began to undress, all the while watching her. Hermione could scarcely form a coherent thought. From the moment he had fastened the collar around her neck, she had felt as if she were in an altered state, completely in his thrall. He tossed the jumper aside and pulled off his boots, his lean back and shoulder muscles flexing with the effort. Each new revelation of skin increased Hermione’s excitement; she wanted nothing but for him to be naked and deep inside her body.

He unfastened his belt and began to open his flies. ‘Pinch your nipples,’ he said, and she complied as if she were in a dream, completely open, no shred of self-consciousness to keep her from moaning at her own touch. ‘Good girl,’ he praised her, grasping his cock and pumping it slowly, bringing himself fully erect. ‘Now, raise your knees and spread your thighs—show me your beautiful, naked cunt.’

Her body obeyed him with almost no effort on her part. She splayed her legs for him, shameless.

‘Offer your breasts,’ he commanded her, and Hermione cupped and raised them toward him, wringing a groan from his throat. Wordlessly, he shucked the remainder of his clothing and lowered himself atop her, his cock rigid against her stomach as he suckled her breasts. She slid her hands into his hair, but he released her nipple and pushed her arms wide, then up, staring down into her face with an almost feral intensity. He grasped both of her wrists in one hand, the other reaching between them to position his cock at her entrance. ‘Whose collar do you wear?’

Hermione rolled her hips helplessly, wanting his cock. ‘Yours,’ she gasped.

‘And who am I?’ he demanded, his black eyes burning into hers.
'My Master!' she cried, grinding against him.

He entered her cunt and her mind simultaneously, two clean thrusts, cleaving her, body and soul. He released her wrists, using both arms to hold himself up from her, maintaining eye contact as he snapped his hips, fucking her. She was on fire for him, the burning seeming to be on a cellular level, translating her corporeal body to flame. And he blazed, as well, white heat in her mind, possessing her on every level, burning away everything that had come before, until only they remained.

You’re mine, he told her, his implacable voice sounding in her mind, his lips pulled back from his teeth in a terrific sneer as he pounded in and out of her.

And as she had done once before, Hermione yielded to him completely, laying down volition, reaching for him with her entire being.

Yours, just as you are mine, she agreed, her voice sounding in their minds. Ah, sweet Merlin, she was within him, and he was within her, and they were one being, raw, exquisite, and scorching, consuming one another in the conflagration of their joining.

She felt his surprise and a fleeting resistance. Clearly, he was not comfortable with having her know him as wholly as he knew her. Stretching to encompass them both, Hermione simply projected her love for him, giving it no name, but wrapping them in it. She offered no challenge, asked no questions, sought no authority over him—but she was a fully functioning partner in the magic they made together, and he would have to learn to accept that. She saw his eyes widen, slowing for a moment the driving motion of his cock into her quim—and when his resistance melted into acceptance, her climax was upon her, her own personal inferno. She clutched at him with her hands, feeling the concatenation as it blazed through her body, and she felt it when he slipped the leash of reality, his control shattered, and together, they tumbled through the vastness of their fusion.

After a time, Hermione realised she couldn’t breathe, and she gently nudged the deadweight atop of her. Her professor rolled onto his back, dragging her with him, a nonverbal spell bringing the emerald green blanket to cover them against the cold. Hermione snuggled happily against her Master, contentment beyond comprehension singing where before, passion had burned.

Turning his face to hers, Severus Snape inquired, between panting breaths, ‘Good God, Hermione —what the fuck was that?’
Chapter 35: Christmas Chains

For the Potions Master’s Amusement

Chapter 35: Christmas Chains

_Turning his face to hers, Severus Snape inquired, between panting breaths, ‘Good God, Hermione—what the fuck was that?’_

Hermione opened her eyes and peered up into his sweaty, incredulous face. ‘It was _amazing_, Master,’ she answered honestly.

He frowned at her, not seeming to notice her use of his new title. ‘That’s not what I meant.’

Hermione stroked a hand down his damp chest, tracing through the black hairs there. ‘You didn’t think it was …’ she began, but he forestalled her, pushing up on one elbow and capturing her chin in the other.

‘You know _exactly_ how I felt,’ he said, his voice low-pitched and pulsing with warning.

Hermione nodded, not daring to speak.

_‘That_ is the phenomenon for which I would like to receive an explanation,’ he informed her tersely. ‘It wasn’t Legilimency. What spell did you cast on me?’

‘I _did_ feel your emotions,’ she admitted, thrilling again to know how intensely he had felt their union. ‘But I didn’t cast a spell. I don’t know a spell that would do that.’

He released her chin, seemingly satisfied with her answer, and laid back, crossing his arms behind his head, a contemplative look upon his face. Hermione leaned over him, solicitous.

‘It happened before,’ she said hesitantly, ‘to a lesser degree, the first time we had intercourse.’

His eyes returned to her face, glittering strangely in the firelight.

‘I didn’t know what it was then, either,’ she said.

‘What did you do just before it happened?’ he asked calmly.

‘I surrendered,’ she said simply. ‘I consciously opened myself to you, and when I did, I was _within_ you, just as you were within me.’ She dropped her eyes, picking at a loose thread on the emerald green blanket. ‘I didn’t mean to be intrusive,’ she said in a small voice.

Several moments passed, and Hermione gnawed at her lower lip, discomfited by the silence. What was he thinking? She hadn’t meant to do it—hadn’t meant to do _anything_, except to open herself to him even more fully than before.
At length, the professor spoke. ‘If it had been anyone other than you, I would have found it intrusive,’ he said quietly, and she glanced quickly his face, relief flooding her. ‘To be perfectly frank,’ he added, ‘I found the experience highly erotic, if rather unsettling.’

Heartened, Hermione moved closer to him. ‘You liked it?’ she asked.

He reached for her, pulling her against him. ‘It was a singular experience,’ he said, ‘something which I have never before encountered. I don’t know what to think of it.’

Hermione remained silent, feeling somewhat abashed. How could he not like it? She relished having him so deeply into her—did he not want her consciousness within him?

As if reading her thoughts, her professor moved her again onto her back, and he rose over her, one long-fingered hand closing over her throat, just beneath the black leather collar. His hair hung limply on either side of his thin face, his eyes an ebony abyss. His fingertips exerted the lightest pressure upon her neck as he looked down into her face. ‘It is simply another way in which you are unique amongst women I have known, pet,’ he said, and he bent his neck, the tip of his wicked tongue teasing the corner of her mouth.

She let out a tiny gasp at the contact, and he took the opportunity to slide his tongue between her lips. Hermione closed her eyes and accepted his sensual kiss, very conscious of the hand at her throat. She was unsure if he was exerting a form of physical control over her movements or if he was simply enjoying the presence of his collar upon her neck, but it scarcely mattered. She raised a hand to his face, tenderly stroking his freshly shaved cheek, and he surprised her by turning his face into her palm, his lips moving there, an action of supplication in strange counterpoint to the hand which slid up the slender column of her throat, passing over the collar and applying slight pressure to the pulse points just beneath her jaw.

For the tiniest moment, Hermione felt lightheaded, her heart rate increasing. What was he doing? Surely he wouldn’t throttle her? His lips left hers, and he raised his head, staring down into her eyes, seeming to absorb her acquiescence. Then he released her, rolling away, moving to his feet with a muted groan.

‘Come,’ he said, extending a hand to assist her to rise. ‘I am rather too old for lolling about on the floor for extended periods of time.’

Hermione allowed him to pull her to her feet, forbearing to point out that he had been the one to initiate sex on the floor. She followed him with perfect contentment through the portrait and into his quarters, the glorious presence of the strip of leather about her throat outweighing all other factors.

Twenty minutes later, their skin golden in the candlelight of the bathroom, she rose over his recumbent form in the bath water, his head back, tendrils of hair trailing in the water as she rode his turgid cock. He watched her with half-lidded eyes, occasionally bestirring himself to grind up against her as she lowered herself on him, but otherwise, he received her ministrations passively, only his voice spurring her on.

Hermione slid slowly down him again, constricting her inner muscles, as he had suggested, and his hands settled on her hips, holding her in place, their bodies joined. Obedient to his signals, she
remained still, watching his face. One of his hands left her hip and slid down to her naked quim, delving lightly between her labia to rub her clitoris.

‘Kiss me,’ he commanded, and she leaned forward, bracing her hands on his shoulders, and kissed him, greedily sucking on his tongue as he plucked at her pleasure centre. She writhed on his cock, clutching at him with her hands, electrified by his touch. As the familiar spiral of completion began, he took his hand from her quim and released her mouth. ‘Stop,’ he said.

Hermione sagged onto his chest, breathless, rather disappointed that she had not been permitted to climax. He ran one hand down her back to her bum and gave her a resounding slap.

‘Out of the tub, now,’ he said.

Hermione scrambled up, regretfully feeling his softening erection fall from her body, and she padded across the floor to fetch two towels. Unbidden, she began to dry him as he stood on the bathmat, and he permitted her to do so. She knelt to dry his feet and lower legs, and was not surprised to feel his hands in her hair, holding her in place.

‘Suck my bollocks dry,’ he said, and Hermione did so, opening her mouth wide to hold one testicle, gently suckling and laving simultaneously, proud when his softening prick began to elongate again. She shifted her face, administering the same treatment to the other testicle, feeling her womb tightening with deep arousal when he widened his stance, giving her further room to handle and minister to his heavy scrotum. Mere seconds later the hand in her hair pulled upward, and she lifted her head, pleased when his cock pressed against her lips. She accommodated him eagerly, knowing she was awkward and unpractised, but determined to demonstrate her enthusiasm. The fingers in her hair loosened, caressing her scalp, and she cast a glance up his lean, nude body to his face, finding him staring down into her eyes, an unreadable expression on his face as he watched her suck his cock.

‘Good,’ he told her, stepping back and disengaging from her lips. ‘Come to the bed.’ He strode out into the bedroom, and she followed, admiring the muscle movement in his arse. He turned and caught her eyeing him up; his sneer brought a blush to her cheeks. ‘In the middle of the bed,’ he said shortly. ‘On your hands and knees.’

Hermione scrambled up onto the bed, wondering what was going to come next. He was an odd mixture tonight, of solicitousness and command, intimacy and distance. She felt off-balance, but her craving for him was absolute. It was the only important factor. She arranged herself with her knees spread wide, displaying her needy cunt to him. Would he spank her? Flog her? Fuck her from behind? She didn’t know, but she ached for him to use her.

She heard the wardrobe open and close, then the bed shifted beneath his weight, and he was kneeling behind her. ‘You’ve been a good girl tonight, Hermione,’ he said, his voice settling over her like a velvet mantle. ‘You’ve earned a special reward. Are you ready for it?’

Hermione felt a thrill of fear and tried to look over her shoulder. ‘Yes, please, Master,’ she said breathlessly.

‘Eyes to the front, or I shall blindfold you,’ he snapped, and she stared toward the headboard.

A hard, cold, disc-shaped object was placed on the small of her back, as if she were a table.

‘This is your leather paddle, Hermione,’ he informed her. ‘I am going to use it to paddle your
naughty bottom.’ He stroked down the crack of her bum gently. ‘You’ll find that it packs quite a wallop.’ He lifted it from her back and pressed the broad, rounded leather paddle against first one cheek and then the other. ‘Is there anything you would like to say before we begin?’

Already the burn of desire had begun, bringing a familiar ache to her slick quim. She was very glad she had finished reading Master Maximus’ and t’s book; she knew precisely how to answer him. ‘Thank you, Master,’ she said in a small voice.

‘Very good, pet,’ he said, and then he was in motion, and Hermione felt the stunning impact of the paddle upon her arse.

She cried out, startled and dismayed. This was much more forceful than the professor’s hand; it covered a larger area than her beloved silver hairbrush; it stung more than his belt had ever done and was far more painful than the flogger. The blow to her bum had seemed to shiver all the way up her spine. Would she be able to bear it?

He did not give her much time to consider it, for he swung his arm and the paddle slapped her flesh again. Each impact felt as if it would shatter her into a thousand pieces, and by the third blow, she was sobbing. On the fifth blow, he struck her bottom just above the crease of her quim, and it felt like her clitoris had absorbed impact. She cried out, a new sound, neither gasp nor sob, and he repeated the act twice, then thrice, until her cries were shrieks. Dear Merlin, her bum felt as if it would be bruised black and blue before morning, but her quim was on fire, as if he could paddle her to a screeching climax.

But the tenth blow was not followed by another; instead, he shifted his weight again, and Hermione had the distinct impression of a blunt object broaching her nether lips. Was he fucking her with the paddle handle? Would he do such a thing? Then she heard him grunt, and he grasped her hips, jerking her back onto his cock. He rammed himself inside of her, the fucking like an extension of the paddling. With every jerk of his hips against her arse, his scrotum slapped her labia, and she pushed back against him, wanting more. He moved in and out of her at a cruel pace, his hands holding her hips with bruising possessiveness, driving himself with a lack of restraint she had yet to witness in him. For the first time in their association, she felt herself to be little more than an instrument of completion to him, with his pleasure and his desire all that drove his actions. There was a dimly remembered part of her mind that attempted to send up an alarm against this treatment, but Hermione was virtually deaf to it. If she could bring Severus Snape, her Dominant and her Master, to this level of abandon, she felt nothing but pride and accomplishment, for it could mean only one thing: He felt safe enough in her presence that he could be entirely himself, and he could pay her no higher compliment than that.

His vocalisations grew louder, and he grasped her hair in one fist, tugging until her neck was arched back. His movements became more erratic, and for the second time that night, he spent himself in her body. His slick seed seeped onto her thighs as he withdrew and moved up to collapse on his pillow, eyes closed as he recovered his breath. Hermione remained as she was, afraid to move without his permission. She had been so close to orgasm; if he had persisted for a bit longer …

‘Lie down,’ he said without opening his eyes, reaching for her with one arm. Happy for the invitation, she slid against him, her cheek against his chest.

They remained in this pose for several minutes, and Hermione decided he had fallen asleep. She needed the loo before sleeping, so she slipped out of the bed. When she came back into the bedroom from the bathroom, she was surprised to see him sitting up against the headboard.
‘I thought you were sleeping,’ she said, crossing to the bed.

‘From this time forward,’ he said in tone that brooked no argument, ‘you will not leave my bed without my permission. If you must wake me to ask, then you will do so. Do you understand?’

Hermione swallowed. Damn, collared for less than three hours and already she was in trouble. ‘Of course, Master,’ she responded. ‘I’m sorry.’

He surveyed her in silence for a moment, then said, ‘You did not know, pet. There are things we must speak of, now that you wear my collar.’ He twitched the bedcovers back. ‘Climb in.’

Hermione gladly slid beneath the warm covers, and he immediately covered her body with his, pinning her wrists to the sheets. His hot, midnight eyes studied her face, dwelling on her neck. ‘Do you like your collar?’ he murmured.

‘I love it, Master,’ she answered honestly. ‘I never want to take it off.’

Half a smile touched his lips. ‘Nevertheless, you must,’ he said. ‘I have charmed it to be waterproof, so that you might wear it in the shower or the bath, but you cannot wear it outside of my rooms.’ He bent his head and kissed her throat. ‘I would gladly chain you up and never let you go,’ he murmured into her hair. ‘I would keep you here, naked, to serve my every whim, and you would wear your collar always.’ He shifted to free the lower half of her body, and his fingers spread her labia. ‘Would you like that, pet?’

Hermione spread her legs, moaning as he touched her clitoris. Having him speak to her this way was beyond erotic—she could scarcely believe that four scant months before he had been excoriating her in the kitchen at Grimmauld Place, and now he was opening himself to her, whispering his deepest fantasies into her ear as he fingered her quim. ‘Yes, Master,’ she breathed, ‘I would like that.’

He thrust two fingers inside of her, his thumb dancing over her clitoris. ‘But because we live in the real world, pet, you must leave your collar here, when you go into the castle. And when you return to me, you will take your collar from its place in my study and put it on before you do anything else. Do you understand?’

Hermione tilted her hips up, taking his fingers deeper into her body. ‘I understand, Master,’ she assured him, shamelessly rubbing herself against his hand.

The carriage clock in the sitting room chimed the hour, and he removed his fingers from her wet cunt. She sighed her protest, but he was rolling away from her, sitting on the edge of the bed. Her eyes tracked him, her thoughts muddled with arousal.

‘It’s midnight,’ he said, turning back to her with a flat, rectangular box in his hand. ‘Happy Christmas, pet.’

Hermione was dumbfounded, staring at the dark green wrapping paper encasing the box, tied with a silver ribbon. He had bought her a gift?

‘Don’t you want to open your present?’ he asked, his tone almost teasing.

‘Yes!’ she cried, sitting up and taking it from him. The box was oddly heavy in her hand. ‘May I open it now?’ she asked.
'You may,' he agreed, reaching to tuck a strand of hair behind her ear. ‘So I can see you face,’ he explained.

Hermione smiled at him, then pulled the silver ribbon from the box before carefully slipping her finger beneath the paper and running it along the Spellotaped edge. The paper fell away, and she held a sleek red gift box. Breathlessly, she removed the top to reveal a black velvet oblong box—a jeweller’s box, for the top was inscribed, Asprey, Jewellers of Distinction to the Discriminating Wizard. She gasped. She knew Asprey! She looked to her professor with wide, startled eyes, and he watched her with great satisfaction.

‘You’ll have to open it to find out, pet,’ he said silkily.

Hermione pulled the velvet case from its glossy red box and with some effort, snapped it open. Within, she found a silvery chain which appeared to be wrought of gossamer threads. Wondering, she touched the chain with a fingertip, surprised to find that it did not dissolve beneath her fingertip.

‘What is it?’ she asked.

Her professor stood and murmured an incantation, brightening the light in the room. ‘Come here,’ he commanded, reaching a hand to her.

Hermione scooted across the mattress to stand with him, and he took the box from her, lifting the silvery strand from the box. He held it at her waist level, and it stretched to the floor.

‘This is the chain you will wear for me,’ he told her, wrapping it once about her waist and securing it, leaving a ten inch length to dangle down over one hipbone. ‘You cannot wear your collar out of my rooms, but you can wear this chain every hour of every day that you’re mine. You can wear it beneath your clothing, wear it in your bath, and if your waist grows larger or smaller, the chain will increase or decrease as needed to adapt to your body.’

Hermione stared down at it, marvelling at its lightness against her skin. ‘But won’t I break it if I roll over wrong in bed?’ she asked, wishing she could see how it looked on her.

As if he knew her thoughts, her Master took up his wand and magicked a full-length mirror into the middle of the floor. Hermione turned to view her naked body, adorned now by the black leather collar and the silvery chain. Her professor stepped up behind her, looking at her reflection with her.

‘You can’t break it,’ he explained, yanking on the chain to demonstrate his words.

‘Ouch!’ she protested. ‘Is it charmed not to break?’

‘No need for that,’ he said, his hands sliding down to cup her breasts. ‘It’s made of mithril.’

Hermione burst into laughter. ‘Mithril isn’t real!’ she said. ‘It was in The Lord of the Rings!’

He pinched her nipples, hard enough to get her attention. She sagged a bit against him, her knees feeling weak from the pleasureful pain, which increased the throbbing in her needful quim. ‘Yes,’ her professor said severely, ‘and Tolkien was in trouble for breaching the Statute of Secrecy until the day he died.’

Distracted from her questions by the reawakening desire, Hermione met her Master’s eyes in the mirror, her own muzzy with want.
'You’re very beautiful when you wear my collar and my chain, pet,’ he told her, rolling her nipples between his thumbs and forefingers.

‘Thank you, Master,’ she managed. ‘I’m very happy.’

He spun her around, his nostrils flared, his lips pressed in a thin white line. ‘What did you say?’ he demanded, his voice like ice.

Hermione rested her hands on his chest and looked guilelessly up into his face, her emotions as naked to his eyes as her body. ‘I’ve never been happier than I am right now,’ she told him, her voice suddenly thick with emotion. She touched the fingers of her left hand to the collar and the right hand to the chain. ‘Wearing your collar and your chain—I could die now, feeling as if I have been as happy as it is possible for a person to be.’

A tic jumped in his cheek as he glared down at her, and she could almost see the thoughts roiling through his mind. For some reason, he found it very difficult to accept her words, but he clearly could not discover so much as a speck of dissembling in her, either. Hermione stood without blinking, waiting to see which impulse would win out—whether he would push her away or pull her closer.

At last, a vicious sneer twisted his lips, and he tumbled her back on the bed sheets, following her in one smooth movement, landing between her thighs and nuzzling her damp curls. ‘Let’s see if we can make you happier,’ he growled, then spread her cunt like a ripe fruit and applied himself to devouring her.
Hermione drifted in sleep, safe and warm. Her dreams were sweet, filled with erotic images and feelings of belonging. Even now, she could hear his voice, murmuring into her ear.

‘Over onto your stomach … Yes, exactly like that. Good girl.’

She obeyed instinctively, smiling to herself. He was here, and all was well. With him here, nothing very bad could happen. He was a presence, a force, the bedrock upon which her life was now built. Even asleep, she could feel his strong hands upon her flesh, soothing and enticing, smoothing away bothersome aches.

Her eyes opened, and she saw that candles were dimly lit about her professor’s bedroom. She was on her stomach, and a glance behind her showed the professor on his knees, applying a creamy paste to her buttocks. She recognised the scent; it was a bruise healing ointment he had given her before. It felt divine on her recently paddled bottom, and she sighed in contentment.

‘Awake, are you?’ he said.

‘Hmm,’ Hermione responded.

‘On your back,’ he ordered her peremptorily, and she raised her head to give him a muzzy look.

‘But it’s so early …’ she protested. She hadn’t slept long, and her limbs felt leaden with weariness.

His voice cracked over her like a whip. ‘I do not care to repeat myself, Hermione.’

At his tone, the fog blew out of her mind and her eyes grew wide. He wasn’t happy with her. Swallowing audibly, she rolled onto her back and looked at him apologetically. ‘I’m sorry, Master,’ she said.

His lips were pressed in a thin line. ‘Arms over your head,’ he snapped, and she complied wordlessly, feeling the bindings which closed about her wrists, immobilising her arms. ‘Wearing my collar does not exempt you from obeying me,’ he said sternly. ‘In fact, quite the opposite. Nor does it permit you particular license to pick and choose which of my commands you will obey. If you wear my collar, you do as I say immediately, or you suffer the consequences—is that clear to you?’

Hermione tugged fruitlessly at the bindings on her wrists, staring up at her angered Dominant with misgiving. She had accepted his Dominance—had begged for it—and she felt herself to be perfectly willing to obey him in all things, truly. But she had just woken up and was still tired from their earlier activities. She wasn’t being rebellious; she just wasn’t awake yet. Couldn’t he tell the difference?
‘I didn’t mean to be disobedient,’ she explained in a small voice. ‘I just wasn’t properly awake yet …’

‘Did I ask for an explanation?’ he demanded, cutting ruthlessly across her.

Hermione quailed under his glare. Where was her lover from mere hours before—the one who had done things to her quim with his tongue that she hadn’t known were possible? Had he already forgotten how pleased he had been with her? ‘No, Master,’ she said in an even smaller voice, averting her eyes from his. This wasn’t fair.

‘Look at me when I’m speaking to you, girl,’ he said. His tone was no less firm, but the heat with which he had spoken before was gone.

Hermione raised her eyes reluctantly. He watched her with unwavering black eyes, his naked skin golden in the candlelight. His cock, despite their activities in the night, was half-erect, even as he lectured her.

‘When I tell you to do something, I expect you to do it immediately. This is still new to you, but if you are to occasionally share my bed, then you must learn to become alert upon command. When you do not, you will incur my displeasure.’ He placed his large, warm hands upon her knees, almost as if in a comforting gesture. ‘I have no doubt that you will learn very quickly, Hermione.’

Now his hands were on his cock as he looked at her, spread out before him. Despite her earlier hurt feelings, Hermione could not look away from him as he manipulated his hardening length. He caught the covert look she cast at his busy hand, and his response drew an aching throb from her slickening centre.

‘You’re my good little slut,’ he said, his voice at once rough and utterly seductive. ‘You came to me hoping I would tie you to my bed and fuck your hot little cunt, didn’t you, Hermione?’

‘Yes, Master,’ she breathed, all other considerations forgotten.

‘Show me your slit,’ he said, lazily fisting his hard cock. ‘Maybe I’ll take pity on you and fuck it.’

She didn’t think twice, but raised her knees and opened her thighs to him, the want in her quim like an exquisite pain she could neither deny nor assuage. She was bound to his bed and unable to escape him, a feeling of forced submission which made the entire scene all the more exciting for her. Dear Merlin, but she wanted him.

‘I can smell you,’ he murmured, and using the hand which was not pumping his shaft, he slid two fingers into her body. ‘Wet,’ he confirmed. He moved over her, bracing his arms on either side of her head, looking down into her face. ‘I could fuck you,’ he told her, ‘or I could have a wank and make you watch.’

Hermione raised her hips and wrapped her legs about him, clearly casting her vote. ‘Please fuck me,’ she said breathlessly.

‘Why should I?’ he asked, rotating his hips, just barely entering her body with the tip of his cock.

‘Please,’ she said, ashamed to hear the whine in her voice.

‘What will you do for me?’ he whispered, dipping his head and kissing her throat, nudging a
centimetre further into her channel.

‘Anything,’ she gasped. ‘Please …’

‘That’s my girl,’ he purred, and with a jerk, he drove himself fully into her.

‘Master!’ she cried. She attempted to reach for him, but her wrists were bound, so she simply writhed beneath him, caressing him with her whole body.

‘Your hands are tied,’ he said, fucking her with slow deliberation. ‘You can’t get away from me, Hermione—all you can do is submit to whatever I want to do to your body.’ He lowered himself to his elbows, and his hands closed over her upper arms. ‘You’re helpless against me.’

Hermione absorbed his words, closing her eyes and allowing herself to feel their meaning. It was a perverse fantasy, to be sure, but she could not deny that the very notion excited her. His murmurs acted upon her with as much taunting eroticism as his body did, and before she knew what she was about, a spiralling orgasm began to build—it was coming, she was coming, and there was nothing she could do but feel it blast through her.

Moments later, she opened her eyes, wondering why he had stopped his plundering of her body. He was still within her, still hard, and he was watching her with a touch of amusement. ‘You’re a noisy little slut, you know that?’ he said.

‘I’m sorry,’ she said, suddenly abashed. Had she been the one making that screeching noise?

He pushed himself up until he was kneeling between her legs, his erection slick and glistening with her juices. ‘I like hearing you,’ he told her. He lifted her legs, his palms warm under her calves, and settled her legs on his shoulders before entering her body again. ‘Christ, you’re tight.’

Hermione felt her breathing slightly constricted from the position of her body, but oh! The sensation was incredible; he certainly seemed to be reaching deeper inside her than he had ever done before. She watched him as he moved, his eyes now closed, lost in the sensations she was giving him. He was completely unguarded in the moment; there was no sneer upon his lips, no blank expression on his face. He was clearly transported, and she was aglow with pride that she was able to provide such unadulterated pleasure for him.

Then he turned his face, his hooked nose prominent in profile, and his mouth closed over the arch of her foot. Hermione gasped at the profound carnality of the gesture, her womb contracting painfully in extreme arousal, and when his tongue darted from his mouth, laving her sensitive sole, she stuttered unexpectedly into a second orgasm.

Her body was still convulsing within when his hands gripped her ankles. He plunged wildly three times, and he climaxed with an inarticulate shout. She was aware of him sagging down beside her, and she knew her bottom was in the middle of a great slick spot on the sheets, but when he murmured the incantation to release her wrists, she simply rolled against him and clung into blissful sleep.

Sitting down to Christmas lunch with the other inhabitants of the castle was awkward in the extreme. The Headmaster, as was his wont, had caused one table to be laid for the festive meal, and Hermione
was the last to arrive. The other students were sitting across the table from the staff, but oddly enough, no one had taken the spot directly across from Professor Snape.

She lifted her chin, conscious of the weightless chain about her waist and the remnants of his seed, deep in her body where she could not reach to wash, and she sat down across from him with as much dignity as the Head Girl could muster.

‘Happy Christmas, Professor Snape,’ she said politely, spreading her red napkin across her lap.

‘Scarcely, Miss Granger,’ he snapped irritably, glowering at her.

The Headmaster spoke words of expostulation, but his Potions master made no response. Food was passed round the table, and Hermione filled her plate, thinking that nothing made one as ravenous as rough sex. She ate with enjoyment, responding to the other teachers’ comments to her when she was addressed, but otherwise keeping silent. She was aware of her professor’s frequent glances, but she gave no sign of it. He addressed no one and was the first to leave the table. She watched him go with rapacious eyes, appreciating his ramrod straight back and the imperious manner in which he swept from the room.

He was hers—only hers—and in time, she would make sure that everyone knew it. She excused herself soon afterward and made her way at a leisurely pace to her room at the top of Gryffindor Tower, her mind a happy whirl of imaginings, all of which showcased Hermione Granger proudly on the arm of Severus Snape for all the world to see.

After dinner, a quiet meal eaten back at their usual House tables, Hermione picked up her rucksack and slipped down to the dungeons. She passed through her professor’s office into his study, where she removed from its Disillusioned peg by the door her beautiful leather collar. She fastened it about her throat before she undressed, leaving her things neatly folded, and she advanced into the study.

He sat at the table, writing in his green leather journal, and Hermione saw with a frisson of delight that he used the raven-feather quill she had given him. He had surprised her over breakfast by giving her another gift. She had been delighted by her books, *The Story of O* and a set by A. N. Roquelaure called *The Erotic Trilogy of Sleeping Beauty*.

‘Just for fun,’ he had cautioned. ‘Not to be taken too seriously.’

Now she waited patiently for him to acknowledge her presence, absorbing every detail of his appearance. He wore his forest green jumper, and the lamplight cast a blue-black sheen on the hair which fell forward, hiding his face from her. He allowed her to stand for a quarter of an hour before he put his journal from him and turned to her. His glittering black eyes swept over her nakedness before he spoke.

‘Now that you wear my collar, Hermione, you may approach me and assume the submissive’s pose when you enter my study.’

Hermione crossed quickly to him and knelt at his feet, feeling very much at home. ‘Thank you, Master,’ she said, her eyes averted deferentially.

He did not leave her there for long, but pulled her to her feet. He palmed her breasts, pushing them
together, and buried his face between them, sweeping his thumbs over her nipples. The constant low burn between her thighs kicked abruptly into high gear; he seemed particularly excited tonight. He sucked one nipple, then the other, before producing the nipple clamps from his trouser pocket.

‘Offer your breasts to me,’ he commanded.

Hermione bit her lip; the nipple clamps had been frightening when she was blindfolded, but now they were terrifying. Still, she did as he asked, cupping and lifting her breasts toward him.

He clipped her nipples efficiently, then pulled her into his lap and kissed her mouth. His hands were plunged into her hair, and he cradled her head with terrific tenderness as he ravaged her mouth, setting her quim to throbbing in time with the pinching of her nipples.

‘Up on the table,’ he ordered her, and when she sat on the edge, he urged her onto her back. She sprawled upon the tabletop as if she were Christmas dinner, and he buried his nose in her quim. Hermione moaned appreciatively as he began to eat her out. He sucked gently on her clitoris, inserting his longest finger into her cunt and tapping her sweet spot. Hermione writhed beneath his mouth, on fire, and he deliberately tugged at the chain between the clamps.

‘Fuck!’ she cried, startled by his action and by the entirely delicious pain with shot straight to her quim.

‘Perhaps I shall,’ he teased. He lapped at her juices, denying her the direct clitoral contact she craved, then closed his lips around the needy little bud again, tugging the nipple clamp chain at the same time.

Hermione was aflame, the aching of her breasts translating to erotic provocation of the most extreme sort. She pressed up into his mouth, but he eased back again, denying her what she wanted.

‘Greedy little girl,’ he purred. He sat back and reached for her hands, tugging her into a sitting position. The chain hung down, pulling lightly on her hypersensitive nipples.

‘Please,’ she said, reaching for him.

He stood and pulled her to her feet. Keeping one of her hands, he led her to the centre of the floor before the hearth, and she noticed for the first time that the coffee table had been positioned perpendicularly. On its surface were three tall pillar candles, one each of red, green, and white. He pulled her against him, undulating gently, the cashmere of his jumper abrading her clamped nipples, and she moaned helplessly.

‘Clean my face,’ he said, bending to her. ‘I’m covered in the juices of your naughty little quim.’

Hermione laved his chin with the broad, flat of her tongue, tasting herself on his flesh. When she lapped at his lips, he kissed her hard, wedging a hand between them to finger her quim as he did so. She sucked wildly at his tongue and rubbed herself on his fingers, seeking surcease for the steady burning which now afflicted her entire body.

He released her lips and stepped back from her. ‘Time for the blindfold,’ he said, producing it.

Hermione allowed him to tie the silkily black cloth over her eyes, her heart pounding with anticipation.
'Lie down on your back with your arms and legs spread out,’ he instructed her, assisting as she lowered herself to the hearthrug. ‘It is imperative that you remain perfectly still, no matter what happens. Can you do that?’

‘Yes, Master,’ she replied, trying to hide her anxiety. What was he going to do? Would he remove the clamps soon? She assumed a spread-eagle position, her nipples burning from the clamps, and willed herself to acceptance.

She was aware of him moving away from the fire, toward the coffee table, and he stopped with his booted feet beside her head—she could smell the leather.

‘You’re very beautiful when you submit to me, pet,’ he crooned. ‘Naked, blindfolded, clamped, open for anything I might choose to do to you … what will it be?’

She knew it was a rhetorical question and made no effort to answer him. He moved away, then back again, circumnavigating her body, as if he were a raptor in the sky, circling his prey.

‘Remember, pet—you will remain perfectly still. Is that understood?’

Hermione took a deep breath, focussing on his voice. ‘I’ll remain perfectly still, sir,’ she promised, hoping she could do it.

‘Good girl,’ he said, his voice a mere whisper, and then a bead of fire touched her midriff, spreading in a line to her navel. It was just a touch shy of burning, a delicious heat that cooled almost instantly, leaving a stiff trail on her abdomen. ‘Superb,’ he breathed, and the fire touched again, this time landing between her breasts. ‘My little Gryffindor, decorated for Christmas with crimson candle wax.’

Hermione gasped, tossing her head from side to side but remaining still as a statue from her neck down. He was pouring candle wax upon her body, a practice about which she had read in *The Sensuous Symmetry of Submission*. She had been shocked to read that t found waxing to be one of her favourite games—it sounded almost like torture! But wouldn’t whipping and nipple clamping sound like torture to someone who didn’t know better? And dear God, but this was exquisitely painful, a sweet counterpoint to the burning of her nipple clamps and the throbbing of her quim.

‘Completely still, little one,’ he said, his voice caressing, and then the liquid wax hit her clamped nipple, and Hermione screamed, her hands digging fruitlessly into the rug beneath her body. ‘Yesss,’ her professor hissed, and the line of fire crossed her sternum to coat the other nipple in its metal clamp, the wax hardening upon her skin, leaving her wanting more.

‘Such a perfectly submissive girl,’ his voice praised her, and she was conscious of him walking away for a moment before returning. ‘I think we need some Slytherin green here, pet, don’t you?’

Hermione’s only answer was a hiss as the glob hit her above her pubis and trailed down to her shaven quim, criss-crossing the flesh, tiny amounts seeping in the crack of her labia lips. He painted her thighs with the wax, murmuring to her as he did so, and she glared in the attention, loving the feel of the burning wax as it hit her skin, feeling like a bowstring pulled almost to the breaking point.

When at last he was done, he knelt at her head and removed the blindfold, pressing kisses to each of her eyelids as he did so. ‘Stay still,’ he said, and she was conscious of him stretching out beside her, now as naked as she was. She turned her head to smile at him, but he gestured above them. ‘Look.’
Hermione looked up and saw he had levitated a large mirror over them. She gaped at her appearance. He had decorated her upper body, with special attention to her breasts, with red wax, had iced her lower regions with green wax, and had drizzled her with white candle wax from her ankles to her shoulders. ‘I’m beautiful,’ she said wonderingly.

He shifted beside her, and the mirror winked out of existence. ‘You are beyond beautiful,’ he said with a sudden ferocity which she did not know how to answer. He shifted on top of her, easily penetrating her wet, aching cunt, and began to thrust. ‘Do you know how long it’s been since I’ve fucked so many times in one day?’ he bit out, glaring down at her as if she were somehow at fault. ‘You’re going to be the death of me, girl.’

Hermione wasn’t sure what answer he wanted, for his words seemed at utter odds with his actions. So instead of speaking, she hooked her legs around his hips, feeling the candle wax flaking off onto the rug as he moved over her body.

‘Look at me,’ he growled, and she opened her eyes, feeling him slip into her mind. Already beyond herself, deep in sub space, she simply enveloped him. As she did, the burning in her body translated to burning in her soul, as well, and she knew when he felt it, for he gasped, his actions becoming erratic, losing the rhythm of their coupling.

Please fuck me, Master, she said, rotating her hips encouragingly. I’ll be such a good girl, I promise.

A snarl touched his lips, and he rested his weight on his elbows, his long fingers reaching for the nipple clamps. Hermione didn’t have time to prepare herself; the clamps were off and the blood was rushing to her nipples, a feeling so intense that she had no reserves of strength to withstand it. The tsunami of her orgasm hit her at once, bowling over her professor as surely as it sundered her. Her last awareness was of his frenzied thrusts and the echo of his climactic shout, his eloquence resounding in his own mind as well as hers as she lost consciousness.

Hermione!
Hermione stirred. Her body ached, as if she had the flu, and her head hurt even more. She moved her head, wondering why her pillow felt so hard—and why was she propped into a sitting position? Was she injured?

Struggling against the lethargy, she opened her eyes. She was in the bath—how odd! Flakes of colour, red and green and white, floated on the surface. She frowned at the flakes and raised her fingers to rub her eyes, as if rubbing would banish the pain behind them.

‘Welcome back.’

His voice sounded from behind, warm and resonant. Hermione turned her head to the left, and her cheek came into contact with his shoulder. It wasn’t a pillow behind her head—it was her Master’s chest. He held her safely against him, his legs embracing hers. She consciously relaxed, and his arms encompassed her from behind.

‘How do you feel?’

‘Like I’m sick and have a fever,’ she admitted. ‘What happened?’

He nuzzled her ear through a hank of bushy hair. ‘You had a rather powerful orgasm and lost consciousness.’

Hermione blinked. ‘Are you joking?’

‘In time, my pet, you will find that I never joke about the health and well-being of a submissive under my care.’

Hermione rubbed again at her face. ‘But how is that even possible?’ she asked, feeling irritable. She didn’t like not understanding things, yet she felt too weary to try very hard to get to the bottom of the puzzle.

‘It is a rare phenomenon, but one that occurs occasionally. Don’t fret about it.’

He picked up his wand from the edge of the tub, and the water began to drain away as clean, fluffy towels zoomed to them. ‘We’re going to dry off and get you into bed, where you will swallow a pain relieving potion, like a good girl.’

Hermione was too tired to object to this plan. She allowed him to help her over the edge of the tub onto the bathmat and stood docilely while he dried her off. She felt as if she were only half awake as
he tucked her into his bed, and she obediently swallowed the potion he gave her.

‘Aren’t you coming to bed?’ she asked sleepily as the potion eased her aches.

‘I’ll be right here, if you need me,’ he assured her, nodding toward an armchair at the bedside. ‘Rest.’

Hermione grabbed his hand and nursed it to her cheek, feeling pathetically grateful. ‘Thank you, Master,’ she said, and then it was too hard to hold her eyes open.

She slept.

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Hours later, she sat up on the edge of the bed. Her aches were gone; she felt quite herself, again. Her professor dozed in his chair, wrapped in a woolly black dressing gown, a book open on his lap. He did not look relaxed in sleep; a deep furrow creased between his coal black brows, and lines bracketed his thin lips. Hermione wanted to ease those lines of care from his face. What worries troubled his rest?

She stood over him and removed the book from his legs, setting it carefully on the table at his elbow. Tenderly, she swept the stringy black hair back from his face and leaned over to kiss the crease between his eyebrows. Then she pressed kisses to the lines on either side of his mouth. When she lifted her head to investigate the results of her efforts, she saw his midnight eyes were open, and he was watching her warily.

‘What are you doing?’ he murmured.

‘Kissing away your frown,’ she explained, stroking his cheek tenderly. ‘You looked so tense.’

He stared at her blankly, clearly nonplussed.

Hermione took his hand and gave it a slight tug. ‘Come to bed,’ she urged. ‘You can’t be comfortable there.’

He removed his hand from hers and passed it over his face. ‘Why are you up?’ he said.

Hermione smiled down at him. ‘I woke up and felt better. There’s no need for you to sit up any longer—I’m fine.’

He scowled. ‘I will be the judge of what I need to do, Hermione.’

Her face fell, and she stepped back from him. Why was it so easy for him to put her in the wrong?

One long finger touched her chin and tilted her face up until her eyes met his. ‘A submissive does not seek a relationship where she stands on equal footing with her Master,’ he said calmly. ‘It is a learning process, even for the most instinctive submissive, such as you are, to be trained how to behave with her Master. Remember, pet, that it is not your place to tell me what to do.’

Hermione bit her lip, looking into his thin, haggard face. His hair hung in oily strands, his skin tone was grey beneath his naturally sallow complexion, and his face was as lined as that of a man twenty years his senior. Even so, she found him inexplicably striking, and she was drawn to him with such
intensity that she couldn’t imagine ever feeling more strongly about anything than she did about him. ‘Yes, sir,’ she said softly. ‘What you say makes sense. I apologise for telling you what to do. I do wish you would come to bed with me, though. It makes me happy to lie in your bed with you.’

His eyelids fell to half-mast as his gaze wandered down her nakedness. ‘Come here,’ he said, and received her into his lap with something that sounded like a sigh of pleasure. He murmured an incantation to increase the light in the room, and touched the side of her breast with his fingertips. ‘Are your nipples sore?’

Hermione nodded. ‘Yes—but in a nice way.’

He grasped her nipple firmly between his fingers, and she winced, then relaxed into the sensation, which she felt most warmly between her legs. He smirked. ‘In a nice way?’ he asked.

She flushed but held his gaze as she said, ‘Every time my clothes brush against my nipples tomorrow, I’ll remember how you used me, and that will make me smile—but only I will know why.’

He matched the pressure on her other nipple, and her mouth dropped open, breathing through the discomfort even as she squirmed on his legs.

‘You’re wrong there, pet,’ he purred. ‘I, too, will know why you smile.’

She arched her back, as if to offer her breasts to him more fully, her head lolling on her shoulders. ‘I wish others could know, though,’ she confided dreamily.

His hands dropped abruptly. ‘What are you talking about?’ he said sharply.

Hermione leaned in, trailing kisses up the column of his neck, stopping when her lips were at his ear. ‘I would be proud for people to know I wore the marks of your attentions on my body,’ she whispered.

He took her by the shoulders and forced her to sit up, a frown on his face. ‘You do not imagine that anyone of your acquaintance would rejoice in your … peculiar self-satisfaction, do you?’

She shook her head. ‘No, I know they wouldn’t. It’s sad, really, that I can’t show off my collar and my bruises to anyone who would appreciate them.’

An incredulous look crossed his features, and he snorted derisively. ‘This is the feature of a woman’s mind that I will never comprehend,’ he said.

Hermione sniffed. ‘Say what you will, sir, but I find it difficult to believe that Dominants are not every bit as proud of their handiwork as their submissives are of showing it off—and if a gathering of Dominants does not include a certain amount of one-upmanship, then I question their collective possession of a y-chromosome.’

The burst of laughter with which her Master greeted this comment was everything Hermione could have hoped for. The years fell from his face with the attendant lightness of heart, and his deep, rich baritone rang through the room. Hermione felt proud—nearly as much so as the first time she’d sucked him off—and she beamed at him.

He pinched her chin and kissed her mouth. ‘You’re an impudent piece,’ he said, ‘but how can I
‘Have you taken your previous submissives to D/s gatherings?’ she asked, wondering how far he would permit her to question him.

Hermione watched him from the corner of her eye; she could see that he was in a reminiscent mood. She would have to tread carefully, that he might remain open to her. ‘Did the submissive with you wear your collar?’

His glance sharpened, and he turned his attention to her. Shit, she had hoped to sneak that one in …

‘I wondered when we would come to this,’ he said, amusement tingeing his tone.

Hermione gaped at him. ‘You expected me to ask?’

His eyebrows arched. ‘My dear girl, when have you ever been able to contain yourself?’ he drawled obnoxiously. He made a show of raising his wrist, as if checking the time, though he wore no wristwatch. ‘You’ve managed to restrain your curiosity for more than twenty-four hours. Of course, you were unconscious for part of that time, so we’ll have to make allowances.’

‘Well, will you tell me?’ she asked reasonably. ‘I understand that I’m submissive to your authority, but you asked me all about my previous lovers. As your collared submissive, do I have the right to ask about your previous submissives?’

‘Some Masters might say “no” to that question,’ he mused. ‘However, I believe you have the right to ask.’

Hermione bit the inside of her cheek to prevent herself from screaming at him. Honestly—the man was infuriating! Why couldn’t he just answer the damn question?

He looked into her eyes sombrely. ‘The truth is,’ he said softly, ‘although I have participated in the training of several submissive women, until you, Hermione, no one has been offered or has worn my collar.’

A/N: Oh ho! Yes, it’s a wicked place to leave you, but please don’t fail to share your thoughts with me! I’m eager to hear what you think.
Hermione was struck speechless. He’d never collared a submissive before? Had never been anyone’s Master before? She was simultaneously astounded and thrilled. Unconsciously, her fingers stole to the strip of leather she wore about her neck, and words poured from her.

‘But why have you never collared a submissive before?’

His eyelids were at half-mast now, and he watched her quite keenly from beneath them. ‘I am a live-in teacher at a boarding school in a rather sparsely populated area of Scotland,’ he pointed out. ‘I have frequently had long stretches of my holidays free to spend as I liked, but I do not, in my position, have the freedom to come and go as I please all the time. My responsibilities prevent that—and that makes me a singularly unlikely candidate for a long-term relationship.’

A long-term relationship? Hermione felt a tremor begin in her hands, mimicked by the cloud of butterflies which had erupted in her mid-section. What was he saying? What did he mean?

‘Have you mentored other students, before me?’ she asked.

‘I have mentored two other students,’ he said. ‘Both are now active members of the D/s community, serving Masters. When you go to London, you will meet them.’

Hermione gave her head a slight shake, as if to empty it of the words ‘when you go to London’. She still didn’t like it when he spoke as if they would part company when she left school.

He paused, then added, ‘And before you ask, I would not have wished to collar either of them. They were … unsuitable for me.’

Hermione felt a frisson of pleasure at this utterance; they had been unsuitable, but she wore his collar. Still, she persisted.

‘But you could have had a wife here, to live with you, and your inability to leave the school wouldn’t have mattered,’ she pointed out, pleased that her voice sounded so steady when her insides felt as if they were melting.

He arched an eyebrow at her. ‘I fail to see how that would have led to me collaring a submissive.’

‘Your wife could have been your submissive,’ she explained.

He snorted derisively. ‘Wives make notoriously poor submissives,’ he informed her.
'But what about Master Maximus and t?’ Hermione demanded, somehow stung by his derision.

Professor Snape sobered, a faint frown between his brows. ‘Master Maximus and t are a special case,’ he said quietly. ‘It is quite rare to see a couple well-suited for both marriage and D/s.’

Hermione really couldn’t argue that point; t had written as much in The Sensuous Symmetry of Submission. Instead, she nodded her comprehension, and before she could properly consider it, she blurted out the question for which she truly wanted an answer.

‘If you’ve gone all this time without collaring a submissive, sir, why did you collar me?’

His manner became very grave, and Hermione felt some misgiving. Perhaps it would have been better not to ask that particular question …

‘I have told you before, Hermione, that you and I are a bad idea.’ He gestured between them. ‘Nevertheless, neither of us listened very well to the voice of reason.’ An ugly sneer touched his lips, and with a suddenness that startled her, he grabbed her arms and jerked her violently against him. ‘Collaring you is the most selfish thing I have ever done, make no mistake,’ he ground out. And then he was kissing her, his mouth hard on hers, his tongue thrusting ruthlessly into her mouth.

Hermione grabbed him back, holding him as best she could in the close confines of the armchair, his urgency communicating itself to her as clearly as spoken words. She could scarcely absorb this new information and knew better than to push him any further on the subject tonight, but his overall meaning seemed clear enough: He collared her when he had never before collared another submissive, and that was all she cared about.

He broke their kiss. ‘On the bed, on your back,’ he ordered her, his eyes glittering in the candlelight.

She scrambled to obey him, unsurprised when he shed his dressing gown and followed her. He straddled her torso, staring down at her naked breasts and her face. He extended his hand, and a nonverbal spell sent a stoppered phial zooming to him. He thumbed the cork from the phial in a practised manner and upended it over Hermione’s chest. A thin stream of fragrant oil landed between her breasts, and he drizzled it generously in the valley of her cleavage. Apparently satisfied with his handiwork, he spread the oil between her breasts, then took himself in hand, the slick lubricant coating his hardening shaft.

‘Push your tits together,’ he commanded, his tone sharp, his manner abrupt and decidedly unromantic. He had never used a slang word for her breasts before.

Even so, Hermione found herself excited by his words and actions. She loved it when he thought only of his own pleasure—when he was far enough beyond himself to lose his usual smooth, controlled manner. It told her that he trusted her, and there was no more precious gift he could give her. How many of the other women who had accepted his Dominance had experienced this level of intimacy with him?

While he straddled her, stroking himself to a rock hard erection, Hermione obeyed his instructions, pressing her breasts together and holding them that way. What was he going to do?

His eyes held a wild, nearly daemonic light as he placed the dark red knob of his cock against the tight crease Hermione had made with her breasts and thrust between them, as if she had created for him a faux quim to fuck.
‘Merlin’s balls,’ he breathed, his sneer becoming more pronounced as he watched his cock slide until its glistening tip protruded on her chest, his length still sandwiched between her breasts. He drew back until only the head was in the channel, then thrust again with a groan, the sight of his accomplishment seemingly as satisfactory to him as was the sensation.

Hermione lay like a statue, pressing her breasts together, conscious of his body balanced over her ribcage. He supported much of his weight on his knees, but she was aware that if he sat back on her, she wouldn’t be able to breathe. More important to her, though, were the sounds he uttered and the expression on his face. Clearly, this act was particularly arousing to him. She focussed on him, her eyes darting from his face to his cock, aroused by the mere sight of him fucking her tits.

He thrust forward again, and his cock slipped from between her breasts into the cool night air, drawing a growl of frustration from him. He reached down and his larger hands pushed her breasts together, his thumbs passing over her hardened nipples. She gasped, feeling the caress all the way to her clitoris.

‘Cup your hands over the top,’ he said, and she instantly understood him. Her hands would be like the ceiling of the channel into which he thrust—it would prevent him from slipping out from where he wanted to be.

She did as he asked, and the two of them worked together to create the artificial passage through which he moved. Now that he held her breasts, his thumbs passed rhythmically over her nipples, each touch arousing her further, until her bottom squirmed on the bed, as if she could find friction for her clitoris on the bedclothes. His breathing was becoming laboured as he moved over her. Hermione’s aching quim wanted the action her breasts were getting; she wanted him between her legs, fucking her cunt, rather than slipping and sliding along her chest wall while his thumbs on her nipples drove her insane.

But there was something so primal about his actions; it was like watching him wank, only this time, he was using her body as an aid to accomplish his goal. She became riveted on the sight of his purpling knob thrusting between her breasts, the slit in its tip pulling wide as it came through, leaking small amounts of a natural viscous lubricant as it did so. It occurred to her that she wanted to taste him again, that when he thrust between her breasts, it should be directly into her mouth, where she could lick and suck him. Fruitlessly, she craned her head up, her mouth open, her tongue sweeping out as he thrust through again, but she simply couldn’t reach him from her position.

‘Good God, girl,’ he snarled, ‘do you know what you do to me?’ A spasm crossed his face. ‘Ah, fuck,’ he breathed, and he was moving forward, pushing her arms up above her head. Her wrists were bound, and he was crouching above her face, wanking furiously. ‘Open your mouth, pet,’ he commanded breathlessly, and as she did, he began to come, somehow maintaining the presence of mind to decorate her face with his hot, salty ejaculate. As his climax slowed, he thrust shallowly into her open mouth, and Hermione closed her lips greedily about his cock, sucking him clean.

He moved from atop her, sagging onto his pillow, his breathing an uneven panting. ‘What were you trying to do?’ he asked.

‘I was trying to see if I could get my mouth on you,’ she admitted, feeling the sticky semen beginning to cool on her face.

He rolled on his side, staring down into her come-splattered face. ‘You wanted me to fuck up through your breasts into your mouth?’ he asked.
Hermione nodded, wondering if that desire made her somehow even too perverse for D/s.

‘Christ, but you’re a filthy little girl,’ he growled, fastening his lips to her throat.

Hermione felt the suction of his lips on her throat and knew he was marking her; in her state of arousal, it seemed a perfectly reasonable thing for him to do. ‘I’m your filthy little girl,’ she gasped, tangling her legs with his, trying desperately to bring some part of him in contact with her slick, aching quim.

‘What do you want, little girl?’ he murmured, pressing his thigh between her legs.

‘Oh, please, Master,’ she pled. ‘I want to come.’

He increased the pressure against the apex of her thighs. ‘Why should I let you come?’ he asked her, the tip of his tongue tracing the shell of her ear.

Desperately, Hermione bucked her hips, riding his thigh. ‘Please,’ she begged, unsure of how to answer him. ‘I need to.’

He rolled onto his back, taking her with him. Her wrists were released, and he dragged her on top of him. ‘You need me in your cunt all the time, don’t you, Hermione?’ he purred, his hands seeking out and finding her bottom cheeks, giving them each a squeeze. ‘You need my cock and my fingers and my tongue in every crack and crevasse of your body—say it.’

Hermione struggled to move up his body, wanting to see his face. ‘I need you inside me,’ she said, taking his face between her hands. ‘I need every part of you inside every crack and crevasse of my body every hour of every day.’

For a long moment they stared into each other’s faces. Hermione braced for his entrance into her thoughts, but it didn’t come. At last, a crooked smile touched his thin lips.

‘Well, why didn’t you say so, little slut?’ he purred. ‘Climb up and straddle my face—I’ll lick your hot little quim until you scream.’

Feeling awkward, Hermione climbed off him and crawled up to the headboard, then looked down at him. It still seemed like such a rude thing to do! Trusting him not to suffocate, she lifted one leg over his head and shifted over his face.

‘Heaven,’ he said, his large, hooked nose nuzzling into her pubic hair.

Hermione was too needy to worry after that. He licked her clitoris, several quick flicks of his tongue, then his lips closed around it, sucking gently. She rocked very slowly, increasing her pleasure, and his hands grasped her hips, pulling her down more fully on his face. She groaned, bracing her hands on the headboard, feeling as if her Master was between her labia lips from his chin to the top of his considerable nose. Plainly, he relished this position, for the sucking and smacking noises he made as he devoured her quim left little doubt.

‘Stop thinking,’ his muffled voice commanded, and Hermione bit her lip, knowing he was right—she was thinking too much.

Consciously, she relaxed, closing her eyes and simply feeling what he was doing. Almost instantly,
the spiralling of her orgasm began, and when he detected the change in her breathing, her professor
insinuated a finger between her bum cheeks, fondling and probing her arsehole as he sucked and
licked her clitoris. Bright lights exploded behind her closed eyes as she began to come, and he
deliberately worked the tip of his finger into her bottom even as he subjected her quim to insistent
sucking. When she would have pulled away from him, one hand at her hip held her in place. He
pulled her clitoris and the surrounding flesh into his mouth and flattened her nub between his tongue
and the roof of his mouth, all the time fucking her bum up to the first joint of the invading finger. The
stimulation was too intense, too much, and she wanted him to stop—then the finger was gone from
her bum, and the broad flat of his hand slapped her arse cheeks, pulling her clitoris from his mouth
and causing her to slide up his face, colliding with the bridge of his nose. Hermione heard her Master
groan, but she didn’t have time to wonder if it was in arousal or pain, for she was screaming as the
second wave of climax roared through her body.

She was still shivering as he manhandled her onto the bed, pulling the covers over her shivering
limbs and wrapping her up in his arms.

‘My perfect little pet,’ he crooned, passing a soothing hand down her back. ‘You’ve pleased me very
much, Hermione.’

She clung to him, tears of sheer exultation streaking her cheeks.

‘You thought you had gone as far as you could go,’ he murmured into her hair, ‘but you trusted me,
and you found out I was right and you were wrong, didn’t you?’

‘Yes,’ she admitted, her voice small and shaky.

He tightened his hold on her, and she knew she had pleased him.

‘Who’s your Master?’ he asked, gently rocking her.

‘You are,’ she said, rubbing her cheek against his pectoral muscle.

‘To whom do you belong?’ he continued inexorably.

‘I belong to you, Master,’ she said, raising her face and looking into his glittering ebony eyes.

‘Then you may sleep, little one,’ he said, and with a wave of his hand, the candles were
extinguished.

And you belong to me, she thought, pressing a kiss to his lips before she lowered her head again. You
don’t know it yet, because you’ve never belonged to a woman before—but you are mine.

And pressing her ear to his chest, she listened raptly to the bright thunder of his heart.
The next few days passed as a dream. Hermione and her professor missed many a breakfast in the Great Hall, preferring to remain in bed together, though they managed to make an appearance at dinner each night. Hermione felt as if she were in a dream-like state, for even when she left his presence to spend time in the library, he was ever-present in her mind. How he could fail to be, when her body bore the constant reminders of his ownership?

On Sunday afternoon, sitting at her favourite table in the library, she wore a high-necked jumper to hide the dark purple love bites on her throat. Each touch of the fabric of her bra to her nipples reminded her of how long she had worn the nipple clamps the night before, feeling them hanging from her breasts as she had crawled across the professor’s study at his command, his eyes warm upon her as she had obeyed him.

She had been horrified when he had told her what he wanted her to do. *Crawl*? Like an animal? It was demeaning—why would he ask such a thing of her? She had stood just inside the study, naked save for her collar and the nipple clamps, while he had sat, fully dressed, upon the cobalt blue sofa, waiting for her.

‘Obey me, and you shall be rewarded,’ he had said, tightening the clamps upon her nipples to an exquisite agony.

Chewing on her lower lip, she had hesitated, her modern sensibilities outraged by his request. Then, a question had entered her mind: When had following his instructions ever led to an experience she had wished undone? When had obeying and pleasing him ever put her in a place she did not care to be?

With new resolution, she had lowered herself to all fours and advanced slowly across the floor, amazed at the distance from the doorway to the sofa when traversed in this manner. The weave of the rugs had been rather irritating to her palms and her knees, but halfway to her goal, his voice had stopped her.

‘You are very beautiful, my pet, when you humble yourself to me,’ he had said, his voice caressing her with warmth and approbation.

The very timbre of his voice had brought heat to her quim, and she had continued onward with more speed, eager to reach him.

‘Kneel up,’ he had ordered her, and when she was kneeling between his thighs, he gave a gentle tug to the chain between her clamps, drawing a low moan from her. ‘Take out my cock,’ he had said, suddenly stern. ‘Put it in your mouth, little slut, and be prepared to swallow every drop.’

Hermione had hurried to obey, her fingers fumbling at his fly, fear of failure screaming in her mind.
Still, she had taken his thick erection, feeling a sympathetic throb between her legs as her lips travelled down his shaft, imagining it in her cunt. Her head had bobbed over his lap, the chain of her clamps catching and dragging on the sofa cushion upon which he sat, pulling maddeningly at her nipples, increasing her need. He had laced his fingers in her hair, thrusting firmly into her mouth even as his hands upon her head were gentle. He wouldn’t force her down on him, but she had been determined to do well, emptying her mind of thoughts of how difficult it was and thinking instead of opening herself to him, concentrating on his sounds of pleasure rather than her sensations of discomfort. Her determination had paid off with his shout and the thick, hot jet of liquid hitting the back of her throat. She had swallowed convulsively, following by laving him clean.

He had dragged her into his arms and kissed her mouth, sharing with her the taste of his own seed; he had seemed not to mind at all. Draping her over his lap, he had proceeded to spank her to orgasm, delivering deliciously stinging blows directly to her wet quim until she had screamed her release.

Now she was wool-gathering over her revision materials, rubbing her thighs together and sketching her clamps in the margin of her parchment. She had thought that getting him—having him accept her offer of submission, giving her some assurance of his commitment to their relationship—would relieve her of some level of her obsession with him. Instead, she found that the deeper she followed him into their world of Dominance and submission, the more firmly he possessed her—mind, body, and soul.

And the most exhilarating—and frightening—feature of it all was that she wouldn’t have it any other way.

Relieved to see that it was time for dinner, she abandoned her efforts at revision and packed up, heading for the Great Hall. Tonight, during the time she spent with her Master, if he permitted, she would continue reading The Story of O. She was very much enjoying the story of a woman who allowed her lover to send her away to the chateau at Roissy, in France, to learn to become submissive. Hermione wondered if Roissy was a real place or if there were other such places where submissives went to be trained. It was a thought at once both exciting and disturbing—as was her own submission to Severus Snape, to be honest.

Hermione noticed her Master’s absence from the high table, but she nevertheless made a good meal of roast chicken and baked potatoes. After pudding, she went up to her room, packing her journal in her book bag with a change of clothes for the next day. She had spent every night since the holiday began with her professor and fully expected to be permitted to do so again this night.

Entering his study, she immediately took her collar from its place and fastened it about her throat. She saw that her Master sat at the table, marking papers with broad slashes of red ink. He was freshly showered and shaved, wearing the tight white jumper which so clearly emphasised his fit torso. Troubled, she approached him.

‘Are you going out?’ she said.

His head jerked up, his lips pressed in a thin line. His eyes blazed, and Hermione took a step back, realising her error.

‘Is it your place to speak in this room before you are spoken to?’ he demanded.

Oh, shit. Why couldn’t she remember what she was supposed to do? Mutely, she shook her head in the negative.
‘I see,’ he said icily. ‘You speak out of turn, and then when I ask you a direct question, you do not
deign to answer me?’

‘I apologize, Master,’ Hermione said miserably, falling to her knees, and in so doing, she realised her
second mistake. She was fully dressed, wearing jeans and a jumper.

Oh, shit.

‘Get up,’ he snapped at her.

Feeling ever more wrong-footed, Hermione scrambled back to her feet. Perhaps if she undressed
now …

She grabbed the bottom of her jumper, preparing to pull it over her head, but a vise-like grip closed
around her wrist. Hermione froze, unhappy to see that her Master has risen from his chair and was
towering over her, displeasure radiating from him in waves.

‘Did I tell you to do anything?’ he demanded.

‘You told me to stand up, sir,’ she answered in a small voice.

‘Then do not attempt to undress,’ he said. ‘It is a bit late for you to do so, is it not?’

Hermione bit her lip, feeling completely wretched. Why could she not keep her focus where it was
supposed to be—where he wanted it? As long as she kept his instructions in the forefront of her mind
and followed them, she stayed out of trouble, but when she started thinking about herself—about
what she wanted, instead of his wishes—then everything went pear-shaped.

‘Yes, Master,’ she said miserably.

He released her wrist as if it were distasteful for him to touch her, and he turned away from her,
taking up his cloak from the chair over which it was draped. ‘I am going out,’ he said tersely,
fastening the black garment about his throat.

Tears filled her eyes, and Hermione rubbed them unhappily. He’s angry with me so he’s going to see
that cow, she thought. I hate her! ‘Please,’ she whispered brokenly, stepping toward him with
outstretched hands.

‘Do not,’ he spat, ‘touch me.’

Hermione emitted a sob of despair, raising her hands instead to her face. ‘Don’t go to her!’ she cried.

‘I will not discuss this matter with you any further, at any time, do you understand me?’ he
thundered, anger lancing through his tone, seeming to flay her. ‘I have permitted you a degree of
license in questioning my actions that is unheard of between a Master and a submissive, and this is
my thanks.’ His lip curled disdainfully as he gestured down her body. ‘Disobedience and disrespect!’

His words slapped at her with his scorn, and she sobbed outright, standing pathetically before him
with tears and snot trailing down, too distraught to even wipe her face with her sleeve. She had
frequently cried this hard in his presence, but it had been as a result of his physical discipline and had
been followed by his handkerchief drying her tears. Now, he glared down at her as if he could not
account for her presence in his study.
‘You will stand in the corner until I return,’ he said flatly, pulling black leather gloves from his pocket, jerking his head to indicate the corner in question, far from the bookcases. ‘You will not move for any reason, nor will you entertain yourself in any way. You will think about what you have done, how you plan to make atonement, and what you feel will be a fair punishment for your behaviour.’ He jerked the second glove into place and tossed his hair out of his face. ‘Are these instructions clear to you?’

Hermione watched this unconscious movement of his, and was pierced with desperate want—how could a woman see him and not desire him? ‘Yes, Master,’ she said in a tiny voice, and he turned from her without another word, striding out of the room and closing the door behind him with a snap.

It was not unlike standing in the kitchen at Grimmauld Place upon his command, all those months before. She was sincerely glad that she had used the lavatory before leaving Gryffindor Tower, though. This was not how she had envisioned spending her Sunday evening! But, why, why could she not remember that he had a standing appointment with the shop girl every Sunday night? And it was true, they had spoken of it exhaustively. He was going to visit Taffy Smith in Hogsmeade once a week, whether Hermione liked it or not, and she had better accept it and stop complaining. He had never sought to hide it from her in any way; he had always been perfectly up-front about his meetings with the other woman. If he refused to enlighten her as to the tenor of his relationship with Miss Smith, Hermione was going to have to swallow her unhappiness about it and move on.

But how had her close, warm, intimate relationship with her Master gone so badly wrong so quickly? She had come into his study, and as soon as she had seen how he was dressed, all she could think of was that he was going to see the shop girl. She had forgotten the rules she had accepted for the study—that she would uncover her cunt and wait until he acknowledged her to approach him—she had forgotten everything except her desire for him to stay with her.

She shook her head, staring at the stone wall. She had known going into this relationship that it hinged on her willingness to accept his instruction and discipline. He gave her so much that she so desperately wanted and needed, and all he asked in return was that she be respectful and obedient. It some ways, it was a small mistake to make, to leave on her jeans and knickers and to speak before being spoken to—but in the mind of her Master, she had violated the very bedrock of their agreement—and it was high time for her to accept that his estimation of the importance of certain behaviours was far more important than her own. She had agreed to play by these rules, and she had to respect the rules as well as the man.

Now she frowned, considering the rest of her instructions. How, precisely, would her atonement differ from her punishment? She tilted her head to one side, thinking hard. Atonement was like making amends, so that would be an action on her part, while the punishment would be an action on his part. One of her errors had been to speak out of turn, so perhaps her atonement could be to keep silent for a period of time. It would be difficult, but that more difficult it was, the more he would value it.

But what would be a fair punishment? She knew he would not permit her to choose a punishment she enjoyed. Perhaps she could be tied and spanked with the belt without being permitted to orgasm.

She shifted her weight from one foot to the other and closed her eyes for a moment. The carriage clock had chimed the quarter hour fourteen times since his departure—did he usually stay away for
so long?

She was dozing when she heard him enter the room. She jerked awake, her heart pounding in her chest, somewhere between excitement and dread. He did not speak or approach her; she heard rustling as he removed his cloak, then the tinkle of china, followed by the mouth-watering aroma of tea. He had seated himself upon the sofa behind her and was drinking tea without acknowledging her. She felt a stab of hurt, and her tummy rumbled; she wanted tea and a biscuit.

Minutes ticked by and still he did not speak to her. She heard him pour a second cup of tea, then stand and walk away from her. At long last, his voice was heard.

‘Do not turn around,’ he said.

Hermione remained where she was, wringing her hands anxiously.

‘Did you follow the instructions I gave you?’ he asked.

‘Yes, Master,’ she answered, wanting to turn and to see his beloved face, but he had forbidden her to do so.

‘We will discuss your atonement tomorrow,’ he said. ‘When I leave this room, you are to return to your dormitory. Your punishment will be not to share my bed, until I decide you may do so again.’

She heard the portrait open and close and knew he had entered his living quarters. Sagging to her knees upon the cold stone floor, Hermione wrapped her arms about her torso and rocked, too desolate to even shed a tear.

It was not until the lamps in the room were extinguished, leaving her with only the dying fire to light her way, that she took up her book bag and stumbled from the room.
Chapter 40: Unexpected

For The Potions Master’s Amusement

Chapter 40: Unexpected

After a nearly sleepless night, Hermione washed her face and grabbed her bag, heading down to breakfast. She did not know when she would see Professor Snape again, but she desperately hoped he, too, would be in the Great Hall. If he made eye contact—if he acknowledged her—it would make it so much easier for her to get through the rest of her day.

She climbed down the final flight of stairs into the entrance hall, only to be brought up short by the Headmaster in the doorway of the Great Hall. He smiled his twinkling smile at Hermione, but almost instantly, his attention was distracted from her. His gaze was directed over her head, and a roguish smile touched his lips.

‘Good morning, Severus,’ he said in a mock-grave tone. ‘How honoured we are to see you here for breakfast!’

Hermione’s heart flip-flopped in her chest as her professor’s colourless tones spoke from just behind her.

‘Good morning, Headmaster.’

But Dumbledore’s attention had already reverted to Hermione.

‘And we’re delighted to see you for breakfast as well, Miss Granger—of course.’

Hermione felt her face flush, but the Headmaster had already turned and begun walking toward the Head Table. Feeling faint with dread, she turned to face her professor. He, too, looked as if he had not slept well, if at all. There were dark circles beneath his eyes, and his hair hung in greasy curtains on either side of his gaunt face. He did not give her more than a few seconds to inspect him, for he was speaking tersely, even as he moved past her.

‘I would like to see you in my office directly after breakfast,’ he said.

Hermione didn’t bother to respond, for he swept away from her, and she found her way to the Gryffindor table. Once seated, she darted a glance to the staff table, but her professor’s head was down as he stared at his plate. With a slightly unsteady hand, she served herself a spoonful of scrambled eggs and attempted to eat them, although her stomach felt as if it were full of acid. Being at odds with her Master was misery, but being in accord with him made her very soul sing. It seemed as if there was no middle ground. Either she had his approval or she did not.

Was it worth it?

This was the question which had been plaguing her all night long. Yes, he was sadistic—this was not news to her. It only made sense that his punishment of her would be designed to make her very sorry
for having displeased him. For a submissive, there was no penalty more cruel than to be banished from the presence of her Master. It made her feel ill with apprehension to be outside his good graces.

So why in the name of Nimüe would she deliberately seek out a relationship that would continually place her on the knife’s edge of incurring such harsh treatment? It was not the way of women in the latter half of the twentieth century to behave with such servility to the men in their lives—and it certainly was not the way of Hermione’s generation to do so, whether Muggle or magical. She was a strong, capable, independent woman of exceptional skill and outstanding intelligence. Once she was fully qualified, she would be able to virtually write her own ticket in the workplace. So why would she want to kneel and crawl for Severus Snape?

She nibbled at a piece of dry toast and pushed the eggs about on her plate until they were stone cold. Then, when she saw her professor stand and leave the table, she swallowed the last of her tea and followed suit.

The only sound to be heard in the dungeon corridors as she made her way to his office was her uneven breathing. His door was open, and she entered uncertainly, her eyes immediately seeking out his face as he stood rigidly behind his desk. A jerk of his hand closed and locked the door behind her, and he spoke.

‘We will not stand on ceremony in my study today,’ he said quietly. ‘I would like to have a discussion with you. You may speak your mind.’ He swallowed, and his nostrils flared noticeably as he inhaled. ‘Do you understand?’

Hermione was not comforted by this relaxation of the rules. She still felt uneasy and wrong-footed, but he was waiting for her response, so she said, ‘Yes, sir,’ and followed him through the glowing green doorway into the shimmering light of his study.

He moved immediately to one of the armchairs before the sofa, but Hermione automatically dropped her book bag and reached for her collar. For a sickening moment she was afraid he would tell her not to put it on, but a quick glance over her shoulder confirmed that he was not watching her but staring at the wall of glass, through which the murky green depths of the lake could be seen. The collar secured, she hurried to the sofa and seated herself across from him, feeling a morass of confused emotions seething inside.

As soon as she seated herself, his eyes were on her face, and he looked her over shrewdly for a moment, his gaze lingering for a moment on her collar, before he began to speak.

‘We both spent an unsatisfactory night apart, it would appear,’ he said neutrally.

Hermione wasn’t sure how to answer him, so she simply nodded.

‘Do you have anything you would like to say to begin our discussion?’ he asked, his manner that of an academic kicking off a seminar panel.

It was on the tip of her tongue to blurt out the thoughts which had been haunting her since she had left his rooms the night before, but at the last minute, she dropped her gaze to her hands and said, ‘I would prefer to hear what you wish to say, sir.’

He was silent, and she gripped her hands tightly together, wondering if he were unhappy that she had not immediately aired her grievances. At last, she darted a glance at him and found him watching her with patient, sober eyes.
‘I see,’ he said. Absently, he traced the outline of his thin lips with a long finger. Finally, he straightened in his chair, and his hands gripped the armrests. ‘I regret to say, Hermione, that I you yet another apology.’

Hermione blinked but maintained the presence of mind not to gape at him. Had he not said the selfsame words to her less than a fortnight before? A tiny loosening of anxiety eased her breathing, and she drew in a great draught of air as she waited to hear what he would say next.

His chin rose, and once again, his nostrils flared as he took a deep breath. ‘You are such a remarkably apt submissive that I forget you have scarcely been training for three months, and other than the last ten days, your training has been intermittent at best. As a student, you are not in a place where you can immerse yourself in the D/s lifestyle, though we have certainly played at it since the holidays began.’

The ghost of a smile touched his eyes, and Hermione’s lips quirked in response, as yet another chunk of anxiety fell from her. Dear Merlin, this was the man she loved—why did he have to become so damnably intractable at times?

‘Do you understand that your behaviour yesterday afternoon was unacceptable?’ he asked in a reasonable tone.

Hermione sat forward earnestly. ‘Yes, Master. I was unfocussed, and allowed myself to become totally sidetracked. It was very disrespectful of me.’ She swallowed, remembering her remorse of the day before. ‘I’m very sorry.’

He studied her, then nodded. ‘I believe you are sincere. I accept your apology.’

He stood and crossed the space between them, seating himself at her side. Hermione was riveted by this action; he had not commanded her to come to him, but he had come instead to her. She felt joy rising inside of her, bubbling in her chest and around her heart. Nothing and no one in her experience had ever elicited from her the powerful emotions evoked by this man.

‘Have you decided?’ he asked, drawing her attention back to his face.

‘Decided?’ she echoed, still fighting down the glee which wanted to exit her body in giggles like the pealing of bells.

‘Whether or not I’m worth it,’ he said, his voice dipping to a lower register, raising gooseflesh on her arms as his fingertips tucked an errant hank of hair behind her ear.

Hermione captured his hand and nursed it to her cheek, gazing into the inky pools of his eyes, where she had lost herself more than once and wished to do again, the sooner the better. ‘Oh, sir,’ she whispered, her voice suddenly choked with emotion.

His head dipped, and his lips ghosted over the corner of her mouth. She gasped, turning her face to receive his kiss, but he drew back infinitesimally. ‘Is that a “yes”?’ he said, his coffee-scented breath fanning across her cheek.

‘Yes,’ she whispered, a tear of thankfulness tracking down her cheek.

His tongue darted out, capturing the salty tear, and his lips trailed down her cheek to share its flavour.
with her in a kiss that bordered on reverence. Hermione grasped at him, stroking his face and his hair, feeling as if she had been denied his presence for weeks rather than hours. She sucked his tongue and clung to his shoulders as if a raging tide would tear her away from him if she let go. The heat between them smouldered slowly to flame, and soon he had dragged her onto his lap, one hand stroking up beneath her jumper to fondle her breast, the other patiently undoing the zip on her jeans to creep past the elastic of her knickers. His kisses were long, slow, and drugging, and he continued to kiss and caress until she was a puddle of molten need before his fingertips finally grazed her clitoris.

‘Dear God,’ she moaned.

He shifted her onto the sofa and stood, bending over her to tug off her jumper, discard her bra, and peel her jeans and knickers down her legs with efficiency. Then he was kneeling beside the sofa, his hands and mouth upon her breasts, his hair caressing her skin. He sucked a nipple, rolling the other between his fingertips, humming his approval of her mewling cries of pleasure. He then began to kiss his way down her body, his tongue tracing the staircase of her ribcage down to the valley of her flat tummy. The tip of his tongue dipped into her navel, then he delivered open-mouthed kisses to the top of her quim.

Hermione raised her hips towards his mouth, her body humming with arousal, and he answered her by lifting her leg and insinuating himself between her thighs, pulling her hips toward him. With single-minded concentration, he spread her quim and licked her from her slit to her clit with the broad flat of his tongue, a strangled moan of pleasure from his throat inciting her to grind against his face. He began to flutter the tip of his tongue against her nerve centre with tiny butterfly kisses, and at the same time, he slipped a finger up her channel. She cried out, an inarticulate request for more, and he answered with a second finger, sucking her into his mouth with another moan of his own.

Hermione hovered for those exquisite seconds of eternity on the plateau of arousal so acute that she could scarcely draw breath. Then he thrust his fingers deep, tapping her sweet spot, and she was launched from the plateau, a splintering mass of screaming pleasure.

The aftershocks still echoed through her body as his hands pulled her into an upright position. Then something pressed at her entrance, and she opened her eyes to see him kneeling before the sofa, holding her at the edge of the cushions, thrusting into her quim, his face still slick with her secretions. His teeth were bared, as if he restrained himself in some way, and he thrust slowly and deeply into her body.

‘Look at me, Hermione,’ he breathed, and she knew what he wanted.

She looked into his eyes, welcoming the thrust of his will into her consciousness. For a time, she floated in her own sensations, feeling his turgid cock stroking in and out of her body and knowing he experienced her pleasure and his own simultaneously. His hands held her precisely where he wanted her, giving him the access and the angle he wanted to fuck her, and his mind held her where he wanted her, giving him access to her emotions. But she sensed his frustration a few seconds before he spoke directly into her mind.

Come on, pet, he crooned, rotating his hips and drawing a pleasureful groan from her. Come in … the water’s fine …

And Hermione could deny him nothing. Reaching for him with all her being, she slipped into his consciousness, now truly joined in body, mind, and …
Soul, he supplied, seeming simultaneously smug and unsure, a feat only Severus Snape could accomplish.

Hermione did not hesitate—the glee which had earlier filled her with effervescent delight trilled from her into him as she answered, Yesss .... The joy would not be contained, but found its outlet, sending her careening into a second orgasm, catching him completely by surprise. Even in her climax, she held onto him with body and mind, feeling the concussive force of his answering completion. His face pulled into a rictus of the most extreme pleasure as his seed pumped deep into her womb. Then he pulled her off the couch onto the rug before the fire, Summoning the emerald green blanket to cover them as they held one another and trembled.

The afterglow was intense, hanging on as they moved into the bath. The mind connection was broken, but the vestiges of it remained. They spoke little as he washed her body, then allowed her to bathe him, luxuriating as she massaged shampoo into his scalp. She used the pewter jug she kept on the floor beside the tub for just such purposes to rinse the suds from his hair, and then they floated together in the warmth, their limbs entwined.

‘What will my atonement be?’ Hermione asked sleepily, threading her fingers through the hair on his chest.

His fingers captured her chin and tilted her face until her eyes met his. ‘You owe no atonement,’ he said quietly. ‘My atonement will be ongoing.’ His fingers trailed up her jaw to cup her cheek, and Hermione realised she had experienced a part of his amends just now, in the form of the worshipful pleasuring of her body. ‘I have made more mistakes with you, Hermione, than with any submissive I have ever mentored.’

She stared into his frank ebony eyes. ‘I don’t think you forgive yourself easily when you believe you have made an error,’ she said.

He nodded once, unsmiling.

‘Thank you for making the effort to do so now,’ she murmured. ‘It would break my heart to have you send me away because you felt you had made an error in your treatment of me.’

His grip upon her tightened. ‘Any other submissive would have been sent away the night of the Yule Ball,’ he said, his voice barely above a whisper. ‘Instead, you now wear my collar.’

His fingers met hers as they both touched her magically waterproofed collar.

‘You’re like no one I’ve ever encountered, Hermione,’ he said. ‘No one has ever been able to penetrate my Occlumency shields as you have done—and you aren’t using Legilimency to do it.’

Hermione remained quiet as his eyes passed wonderingly over her features. The joyful, buoyant glee was rising in her once again, her love such a powerful force that she felt a physical ache behind her breastbone.

Then he spoke again, his voice low and intimate. ‘You are, in a word, unexpected, pet. Completely and utterly unexpected.’
Then he put her from him, rising, the cooling water cascading down his lithe, fit form. 'I'm for a nap,' he announced as the water began to drain.

Their previous routine was re-established over the next few days, much to Hermione’s delight. They were careful with one another, she far more attentive to her agreed-upon behaviours, he more measured in his responses to her. Their D/s play was intense and immensely satisfying to her as she surrendered her will to him and reaped the benefits of it. On the morning of New Year’s Eve, he woke her with a box in his hand.

She rubbed her eyes, staring blurrily at the shiny green ribbon it bore. ‘What is it?’ she asked stupidly.

He snorted. ‘Perhaps you should open it,’ he said.

Hermione pushed the ribbon and matching bow from the box and pulled the top off, then pushed the tissue paper aside to reveal a …

‘Riding crop?’ she blurted, alarmed.

He sat down behind her, pulling her against his chest. ‘Your riding crop,’ he murmured into her hair.

Hermione took it by its red leather handle and lifted it from the box, noting the bendy shaft and the broad leather thong at its tip.

‘Mine?’ she said, flicking it. ‘Th-thank you, Master.’

‘Allow me to demonstrate,’ he said, his wicked voice sending a shiver down her spine. He took it in hand and with a smooth downward motion, impacted the mattress with a resounding thwack.

Hermione jumped. ‘Heavens!’ she said, and he stroked her cheek with the whip handle.

‘It is customary for the submissive to greet her crop with affection,’ he informed her.

Hermione decided he sounded as if he were perfectly serious, so she turned her head and pressed a kiss to the red leather handle.

‘Good girl,’ he praised her, stroking a hand down her naked flank. ‘You may experience the joy of your crop tonight, after dinner—a fitting way to greet the New Year, wouldn’t you say?’

Hermione twisted and kissed his mouth. ‘Yes, thank you, sir,’ she said.

He chuckled and stood, twitching the covers completely off of her body. ‘Now, get up and get dressed for breakfast,’ he told her. ‘We shall confound the Headmaster by showing up for breakfast four mornings in a row.’

After breakfast, Hermione returned to her professor’s quarters. He frowned over his marking,
muttering occasionally about the stupidity of the fifth-years, while she updated her green leather journal, notating what she had eaten for breakfast. At ten o’clock, she knelt at his side, and he looked down at her.

‘What is it, little one?’ he asked distractedly.

‘I’m off to revise, sir, if that’s all right.’

He motioned for her to stand and scooted back to make room for her in his lap. ‘I shan’t be in for lunch,’ he told her. ‘I trust you can remain out of trouble until I see you after dinner?’

Hermione smiled up at him, loving it when he teased her. ‘I will do my very best, Master,’ she promised.

He kissed her and ejected her from his lap with a slap to her bottom. ‘See that you do,’ he said and resumed his marking.

Hermione moved to the doorway, where she donned her clothing and shoes, and last of all, removed her collar, placing it on its peg. Then she put her book bag over her shoulder and glanced back at her professor, only to find his eyes on her.

‘See you later,’ she said, and his answer was a humorously arched eyebrow.

After a particularly satisfactory afternoon of revision, Hermione was very glad to go up to dinner in the Great Hall. The house-elves had cooked roast beef, her favourite, and she ate heartily, reading about Theoretical Arithmancy as she did so. She cast frequent glances at the Head Table, catching the Headmaster’s eye more than once and receiving twinkling smiles from him, but Professor Snape did not materialise. Where was he? Had he decided to eat in his rooms?

With a mental shrug, Hermione made her way to Gryffindor Tower, daydreaming about her crop and how he would use it on her. She bathed with particular care, making sure she was shaved and smooth and applying scented moisturising lotion to her skin. She took care with her hair, putting it up in an elaborate twist, but she didn’t bother with what she would wear—she would be naked, save for her collar, and she was very happy with that notion.

Wrapping herself in robes and a cloak, she cast a Disillusionment Charm on herself and slipped down to the dungeons, anticipation singing in her body. But when she reached her professor’s door, it did not open, and there was no answer to her knock.

Frowning, she considered what she ought to do. She had never before been unable to enter her professor’s quarters, so she was at a loss, and her journal was locked in there, as well, so he would not be able to communicate with her that way.

‘Fuck a duck,’ she muttered, annoyed. Then she trekked back up to her dormitory.

She sat in her window seat, keeping watch for those who might be coming into or going out of the castle, but aside from the teachers going down to the village for a New Year’s nightcap, she saw no one. Every two hours, she made the journey down to the dungeons, but his office door remained closed to her.
Where was he?

At one o’clock in the morning, the teachers made their winding way back to the castle, and at two, Hermione made her last trip down to the dungeons. Trudging disconsolately back to her dormitory, she acknowledged that he had most likely been called by Voldemort; otherwise, he would not have broken faith with her. Of this, she was certain.

She slept fitfully, her dreams dark and dreadful. At daybreak, she crept down to the professor’s office, but he still did not answer her knock. Truly worried, she went to breakfast and poured a cup of coffee, watching the Head Table obsessively, as if she could make him appear by will power alone.

Then there was a great flutter in the air, and Hermione looked up to see owls streaming into the Great Hall. She pulled some Knuts out of her pocket for the barn owl bearing her copy of the *Daily Prophet*, but it was the appearance of Hedwig that alarmed her. Why was Harry writing to her?

With great foreboding, she took the parchment from Hedwig’s leg and began to read. She was conscious of a great shout from the Head Table, but she pushed the knowledge away, determined to read Harry’s letter.

_Hermione,_

The Burrow was attacked last night just after midnight. Mrs Weasley took a Stunner to the chest and is in St Mungo’s, but everyone else escaped unharmed. Ron and I are on the run. Don’t try to come to us now—you’ll be safer in hiding. We’ll be in contact when we can.

-Harry

Indignation roiled through her. After all they had been through together, Harry and Ron were on the run without her? They wouldn’t last a week, the two dunderheads! She sniffed and twitched open the *Prophet*, and her heart dropped to her feet.

_Azkaban Prison Demolished by Death Eaters*, the headline blazed. In slightly smaller type it continued, *All Prisoners Now at Large*.

On the bottom half of the front page, a second headline proclaimed, *Death Eaters Wanted in Connection With Azkaban Prison Breakout*. In slightly smaller type it continued, *Hogwarts Teacher Ringleader Amongst the Prison Breakers*, and below the headline, front and centre, was the snarling face of Severus Snape.
Chapter 41: The Contingency

For the Potions Master’s Amusement

Chapter 41: The Contingency

Hermione dropped the newspaper, twisting to look at the Head Table. For the first time, she realised the Headmaster was absent. Professors McGonagall, Flitwick, and Sprout were in whispered conference, but the younger students were oblivious to the tension which had been caused by the delivery of the morning paper. Hermione tried to force herself to think, but it was as if her mind didn’t want to cooperate with her.

Rising from her seat, she shoved the *Daily Prophet* into her book bag and left the Great Hall. Shifting her eyes nervously from side to side, she verified that she was the only person in the entrance hall and hurried to the stairs down to the dungeons. It seemed impossible to her that her professor was gone, that he wouldn’t—couldn’t!—come back to her. He had been *seen*. He was an outlaw now; his affiliation with the Death Eaters was public knowledge. Had the Headmaster known this would happen when he asked Professor Snape to spy for the Order of the Phoenix? Had he planned for it? If he *had* made contingency plans, what were they?

Most importantly, how could Hermione get in contact with her professor?

With all these thoughts whirling about in her mind like clothes in a Muggle tumble dryer, she crept along the passageway to her professor’s office. If she could just get inside, she could reclaim her journal. If they each had their journals, they could still communicate, no matter how far apart they were. And after all, she was nearly a full day behind on recording her meals and revision schedule, and her professor would be terribly cross with her for it …

‘Miss Granger!’

Hermione was jerked back to the present by the sound of her name and found herself looking up into the sharp blue eyes of Albus Dumbledore.

‘What are you doing wandering about in the dungeons?’ the Headmaster asked sternly.

Hermione pulled the newspaper from her bag. ‘Headmaster,’ she said, ‘this can’t possibly be right …’

The old man did not glance at the picture of his Potions master, but kept his eyes on the Head Girl. ‘You may take it from me that the news report is quite correct,’ he said dryly. His stern look softened slightly, and he spoke again, lowering his voice confidentially. ‘You mustn’t be alarmed about your friends, Miss Granger—I have been in contact with Harry, and they are quite safe, at the moment.’

Hermione grasped the sleeve of the Headmaster’s purple robes. ‘But what about Professor Snape?’ she said anxiously.

The crease between Dumbledore’s eyes deepened, and it seemed as if his blue eyes pierced her.
Remembering what her professor had said about the Headmaster’s abilities as a Legilimens, Hermione averted her gaze from him.

‘Professor Snape is where he must be, doing the job he has volunteered to do,’ the old man said firmly. ‘Magical Law Enforcement has already been in touch with me to request access to Professor Snape’s quarters, for investigative purposes, but I find that the rooms have sealed themselves against intrusion.’

Hermione darted a quick look at Dumbledore’s face, alerted by the bland quality of his tone. ‘Do you mean to say that you are unable to dispel the enchantments on Professor Snape’s rooms?’ she asked suspiciously.

The Headmaster’s lips curled in a tiny smile. ‘Oh, I’m sure I will manage to provide access for the Aurors … eventually.’ The old man’s expression sobered again, and he took Hermione’s arm, beginning to lead her away from Professor Snape’s office. ‘I am sorry to say, my dear, that you had best go up to your dormitory and pack your trunk.’

Hermione stopped dead in her tracks, feeling as if she had been punched in the stomach. ‘But why?’ she gasped. Things were happening too quickly—changing entirely too fast!—she couldn’t think rapidly enough to keep pace with the speed at which her world was altering.

Professor Dumbledore made a gesture for Hermione to continue down the corridor, and she complied on slightly unsteady legs.

‘The students will not be returning on the Hogwarts Express tomorrow, as previously planned,’ he said gravely. ‘Instead, we will be contacting the parents of those students who have remained at school for the holiday, to alert them that Hogwarts School will be closing.’

Hermione looked up at his lined face, touched by the sadness in his voice.

‘At present,’ he said, ‘it is unsafe for the students to remain here. Lord Voldemort has made it clear—and my inside sources confirm that it is true—that the Death Eaters mean to take over the school.’

They arrived at the staircase up to the entrance hall, and the Headmaster gestured for Hermione to go before him, giving her a humourless smile as he did so. ‘Of course,’ he added, ‘the teachers and I will do everything in our power to prevent that from happening—and there is quite a bit within our power, if I do say so myself.’

He escorted Hermione to the marble staircase leading up to the first floor and beyond, and he took her hand between his. ‘Please be prepared to depart first thing in the morning,’ he said. ‘If I don’t have another opportunity to do so, allow me to wish you farewell, as well as a Happy New Year, Miss Granger.’

Hermione thanked him and began to climb up to her dormitory, trying desperately to think of a way to halt—or at least to slow down—the runaway train which had become her life.

She sat at her desk, parchment and quill before her, trying to make sense of what she had learned and what choices were before her. She stared at one side of her page, upon which the words Burrow attack were underlined and followed by (1) Other injuries?, (2) Condition of Mrs Weasley?, (3)
**Condition of the Burrow?** On the other side of the thin black line she had drawn down the centre of her parchment she had written *Professor Snape* and underlined it; below she had written *(1) Injuries?, (2) Communication?, (3) Possessions in his rooms? (a) journal, (b) collar.*

She was staring at the list, chewing on her lip, when there was a knock at her door. ‘Come in,’ she called and was unsurprised when her Head of House entered.

Professor McGonagall looked harried, her tight black bun suffering from fly-away hairs, and her lined face was drawn and grey. She looked swiftly about Hermione’s room with her beady dark eyes and sniffed. ‘You haven’t begun to pack your trunk?’ she said.

Hermione moved a book to cover her scribbled parchment and rose to approach her teacher. ‘No, not yet,’ she agreed.

Professor McGonagall consulted her list. ‘I attempted to contact your parents but was not successful,’ she said.

Hermione nodded. ‘They’re on holiday in Switzerland. They’ll be back in a week or so.’

McGonagall frowned. ‘We must make provision for your safe delivery to a relative, Miss Granger,’ she said distractedly.

Hermione had been thinking about this; it might be her way to shake free of her constraints and try to find the boys … or her professor. ‘I am of age,’ she reminded McGonagall. ‘I can go to the Order headquarters and wait for my parents to return to England.’

The old lady’s lips thinned. ‘No, you may not,’ she said sharply. ‘There will be no one in residence at headquarters to supervise a student. I would suggest you go to the Burrow, but the Weasleys are sitting with Molly in shifts. It would be a bad time to impose.’ She looked harassed.

‘Please don’t worry about me, ma’am,’ Hermione said earnestly. ‘I’ll go to my parents’ home and stay there. I’ll be fine.’

McGonagall looked doubtful. ‘But how will you travel?’ she said. ‘Your parents are not hooked up to the Floo Network.’

‘I’ll go on the Knight Bus,’ Hermione said soothingly. ‘I’ll be fine,’ she added again.

McGonagall studied her silently for a time, and Hermione held her breath, wanting very much to get her way about this. If only she had freedom of movement …

Her Head of House seemed to come to decision, for she scratched something on her list. ‘Very well, Miss Granger,’ she said. ‘Please be ready to depart directly after breakfast.’

‘I will,’ she promised, feeling a grim pleasure at her victory.

Hermione trailed down to dinner that evening with her closely-written list and her Self-Inking Quill. She had thought about the dilemma until her head ached, and she still wasn’t sure what she should do. She had always thought that she and Ron would be with Harry, helping him with his task, until
the very end—but now she was separated from her friends—and the separation, she realised, was more than one of distance.

She scooped bangers and mash onto her plate and took a long drink of pumpkin juice. Her involvement with Severus Snape had changed everything in her life; there was no denying it. And oddly enough, she didn’t mind. She still felt strongly about fighting for the Light against Voldemort, and she desperately wanted Harry to be successful in his quest to defeat the Dark wizard—but she had begun to view the entire struggle from another point of view: She had begun to see things from the perspective of Dumbledore’s spy, her own beloved professor. She could clearly see the work he was doing, remaining at the heart of the Death Eaters and supplying the Order with information about Voldemort’s plans—and in a visceral way, she felt a strong self interest in having Professor Snape come out of the conflict in one piece. She would be devastated if something terrible happened to Harry or Ron, it was true, but Severus Snape was the man she loved, and her loyalty now was to him.

A rueful smile touched her lips, and Hermione popped a sprout into her mouth. Ron had always said she needed to get her priorities sorted—and it had taken her most of the day, but she felt she had finally reached a decision. Her destiny was now divided from that of her two best friends and irrevocably linked to that of her Dominant and her Master, Severus Snape.

She would proceed with her planning from that very important—and sobering—detail.

She closed the lid on her trunk and took another look around her dormitory. Everything was packed, except for some rather personal and essential items. She had thought of a way that might allow her to retrieve those things, though.

‘Wretch!’ she called, and with a pop!, the miserable-looking house-elf appeared.

‘How can Wretch serve Miss?’ he asked, bowing very low.

‘Wretch,’ she said, ‘I know you look after Professor Snape …’

‘No, Miss,’ the house-elf interrupted politely but firmly. ‘Severus Snape is no longer being a professor at Hogwarts. Wretch is no longer looking after Severus Snape.’

Hermione narrowed her eyes. ‘I have some belongings in the rooms used by Prof—by Severus Snape,’ she said. ‘Can you get them for me or take me there to get them?’

Wretch bowed again. ‘Wretch is not able to enter the rooms, Miss, not even to clean them.’ The house-elf’s obvious disapproval spoke of his opinion of this fact. ‘Wretch is not able to help.’

And without further ado, the house-elf Disapparated.

‘Well, fuck a duck,’ Hermione muttered. She wondered if house-elves were able to lie. Was Wretch perhaps protecting her professor? Regardless of his motives, Hermione was left in the same situation. She would have to leave Hogwarts without either her collar or her journal, and the idea made her feel so sad that she wanted to cry.

A flash at her window drew her attention, and she saw a small barn owl fluttering beyond the glass.
She had a letter!

Scrambling across the room, she opened the window, allowing the barn owl to come in out of the icy cold of the January night. The owl hopped along the embrasure and offered her its leg, from which she removed a parchment inscribed with her name in an unfamiliar hand. Her heart plummeted; she had so hoped it would be from her professor, or even from Harry and Ron!

Absent-mindedly, she retrieved some owl treats from her desk, tossing them to the bird, and she broke the seal on the letter, beginning to read.

*Dear Hermione,*

I am writing to you at the behest of a person whose name I shall not mention, but you know who it is—you hoped this letter was from him.

Hermione blinked and gooseflesh pebbled her arms. Someone knew her thoughts a bit too well.

*He put this plan in place to provide for you in the case of an emergency. I think you will agree with me that our current situation fits that description.*

Good heavens! It was as good as a letter from her professor, wasn’t it? She took a deep breath and forced herself to continue reading, slowly.

*I am called t; our mutual friend tells me that you have read my book and will recognize my name. That same friend wishes for you to travel to a place where he may be assured of your safety, and where he may also contact you if the opportunity presents itself. He has asked me to conduct you to that place and to introduce you to its inhabitants.*

I know that some students will be travelling by Knight Bus tomorrow, and I will be on the Knight Bus as well. We may meet there, and you will have an opportunity to decide if you will permit me to escort you to the safe house per our friend’s wishes, or if you will continue on to your own home.

You and I are sisters in a way that few can comprehend, and I am eager to meet you. It is a very fine thing to have a friend with whom one can discuss the things in life that are most important. I sincerely hope that we will be friends in that way.

Please send a reply by Pokey so I will know whether or not to expect you. As for me, I will be the girl in the fur-trimmed cloak.

*Until tomorrow,*

~~t~~

Hermione set the parchment on the desktop, clasping her hands together as if to stop them from shaking.
He had considered her! He had made plans for her! He had been thinking ahead with her safety in mind. The very notion brought a rush of love so powerful that she doubled over, holding her midriff, missing her Master so acutely that it was a physical pain.

After a moment, she straightened up and scrawled a short note on a piece of parchment. She then approached the barn owl, which sat docilely near the window, watching her with wide eyes.

‘So, you’re called Pokey?’ she asked, tying the letter to the owl’s leg. ‘Take that to t, all right?’

Pokey the owl hooted once, and Hermione opened the window again, allowing the bird to fly away. Then she stretched out on her bed and wrapped herself in her blanket, wondering if she would sleep. She was going away from Hogwarts, away from everyone she had known and cared about for the last seven years, on the second-hand word of a man she had been involved with for less than six months.

‘I don’t care,’ she told Crookshanks fiercely, burying her face in his coarse ginger fur. ‘I love him.’

Crooks did not deign to answer this but purred beneath her cheek until she was lulled to sleep.

The next morning, Hermione dashed up to the back of the queue waiting to board the Knight Bus, Crookshanks’ basket clutched in one hand, her trunk floating obediently behind her. She stared curiously at the people ahead of her, but she saw no one matching her idea of what Master Maximus’ wife and submissive would look like. She allowed Stan Shunpike to wrestle her trunk on board, nodded a greeting to Ernie Prang, and walked the length of the bus without finding her contact.

With a disgruntled frown, she climbed the twisting steps of the double-decker bus, finding only one other person on the second level. It was someone wearing a rich looking black cloak, and as Hermione drew closer, she saw that the hood pulled over the person’s head was trimmed in black fur. She smiled to herself, and her anxiety quieted a bit; at least she had made the connection her professor had wanted her to make.

‘Hi, I’m Hermione,’ she said, coming around the bench upon which the other woman sat and settling herself on the facing seat.

For a moment, she had the simple impression of fair hair topped by a fur-trimmed hood. Then the other woman looked up and pushed the hood back, and Hermione was staring down into the hated face of Miss Taffy Smith, shop girl and cow.
Hermione was staring down into the hated face of Miss Taffy Smith, shop girl and cow.

‘You!’ Hermione spat, the collision of her worlds throwing her momentarily off balance.

The other woman’s face broke into a smile. ‘I’ve seen you before, in the Three Broomsticks,’ she said in a friendly fashion. ‘I wonder why he didn’t just tell me it was you—because you’ve grown up tremendously since this was taken.’

Taffy extended something towards Hermione, who snatched it and stared if for no other reason than to have something to do besides looking into Taffy’s face. It was a newspaper clipping, carefully trimmed about the rectangular edges of the photograph, but dangerously tattered along the midline crease, as if it had been folded and carried in a man’s wallet. The photograph was of her, primped and dressed for the Yule Ball during the Triwizard Tournament—the year she had gone with Viktor Krum. With a fingertip, she traced the nearly transparent crease, worn from numerous occasions of hiding, revealing, and hiding again the photograph, in which Hermione smiled, dipped her head shyly, and darted a coquettish look from beneath her lashes.

‘Where did you get this?’ she asked, her mind unable to grasp the obvious answer.

The Knight Bus lurched violently into action and a chorus of startled laughs issued from the students seated below. Taffy Smith braced herself and watched Hermione with a half-smile on her lips. ‘I think you already know the answer to that question,’ she said simply.

Hermione thrust the clipping back at Taffy, but the other girl waved it off. ‘You can keep it,’ she said. ‘I’m sure he’ll want it back.’

Hermione looked up eagerly. ‘I’ll see him?’ she breathed.

Taffy leaned forward and gave her hand a comforting squeeze. ‘Of course you will,’ she said staunchly.

Hermione pulled her hand away, studying the other girl’s features, feeling a roiling conflict of loathing mixed with hope. ‘But he told me you aren’t a submissive!’ she blurted, remembering.

Taffy’s eyebrows arched at Hermione’s tone. ‘Did he?’ she said. ‘How strange.’ She pursed her lips and crossed her arms over her breasts. ‘Were you, perhaps, jealous when you asked him?’ she asked shrewdly.

Hermione felt her face flame, and her lips parted to deliver a heated response, but she was foiled by Taffy’s soft, understanding laugh.
‘Of course you were,’ she said, almost as if to herself. ‘You asked about me, he wouldn’t tell you anything, and he finally got you to shut up about it when he told you I wasn’t a sub.’ She nodded, as if she had solved a difficult puzzle.

Hermione desperately wanted to say something annihilating, but she couldn’t do it—Taffy’s assessment was too close to the truth. ‘I never really shut up about it,’ she admitted sotto voce, staring at her hands.

A gurgle of laughter greeted her statement. ‘I wouldn’t have done, either,’ Taffy assured her. ‘I’m sorry that he wouldn’t tell you about me, Hermione, but you see, he had promised my husband he wouldn’t.’

Hermione’s head jerked up, her eyes widening. What was she thinking? This was T, Master Maximus’ wife—of course she wasn’t after Hermione’s Master. ‘I … I see,’ she said.

Taffy took her hand again, giving it another squeeze, and this time, Hermione returned the pressure, feeling a measure of comfort beginning to thaw the icy terror which had been coursing through her for the best part of two days.

‘Would you like to hear about it?’ Taffy inquired gently.

‘Very much,’ Hermione said gratefully.

Taffy nodded and settled back in her seat again. ‘Well, if you’ve read my book, then you already know how I met and married my husband,’ she said. ‘He was a schoolmate of …’ her eyes darted side-to-side as she lowered her voice ‘our mutual friend’s. They both became part of two exclusive groups when they left school. Can you guess what they were?’

Hermione swallowed. ‘One was the Death Eaters,’ she whispered.

‘Yes,’ Taffy said. ‘The other was the D/s community in London.’

Hermione’s lips formed a small horrified circle. ‘Please tell me the two aren’t related,’ she begged.

Taffy shook her head in the negative. ‘There is some overlapping of those in the lifestyle amongst both the Dark and the Light,’ she said. ‘As a group, however, the D/s community is apolitical. When we come together, we leave those distinctions at the door.’

Hermione looked sceptical. ‘And it’s as easy as that?’ she asked.

Taffy shrugged. ‘The doyen of our group is well respected, and at our meetings, his word is law.’ For a moment, she seemed lost in thought, then she turned back to Hermione. ‘You’re familiar with the return of You-Know-Who,’ she stated.

Hermione grimaced. ‘Unfortunately.’

‘That occurred soon after my marriage took place,’ Taffy looked sad. ‘My husband was, of course, constrained to return to You-Know-Who. However, during the years of the Dark Lord’s absence, our mutual friend had convinced my husband that the Light were in the right of things.’

Hermione breathed an internal sigh of relief. Thank Merlin Taffy’s husband was no longer a believer in Voldemort’s cause. How awkward it would have been for Harry Potter’s best friend to be in the
safekeeping of a Death Eater’s wife! ‘Where is your husband now?’ Hermione asked.

‘Patience, little sister,’ Taffy said, her tone tinged with affection. ‘My husband met with the Headmaster and pledged himself to spy for the Order of the Phoenix. Then a group of Death Eaters encountered Harry Potter at the Ministry of Magic.’

‘I know,’ Hermione interrupted grimly. ‘I was there.’

Taffy regarded her with respect. ‘You’re very brave,’ she said quietly. ‘You know the Death Eaters involved in that debacle went to prison.’ She pressed her lips firmly together, but Hermione could see the trembling, and suddenly, she understood.

‘Your husband was one of them,’ she said. ‘He went to Azkaban.’

Taffy nodded, dashing at the tears on her cheeks with the back of her hand. ‘It was a terrible time,’ she said, her voice thick with emotion.

Hermione pulled a handkerchief from her cloak pocket, feeling a thump of sympathy for the other girl. She had been separated from her Master for well over a year! How could she endure it?

‘You must miss him awfully,’ Hermione said.

‘Every single day,’ Taffy answered. She cleared her throat. ‘My husband and I had been married secretly, you see—our families would not have consented or approved—so only our friends in the D/s community knew about us. He didn’t want the Dark Lord to know about me, so he had made a contingency plan.’

‘That must be a Dominant speciality,’ Hermione said wryly.

Taffy continued as if Hermione had not spoken. ‘I was frantic with worry, waiting for my husband to return, but it was our mutual friend who came knocking at my door well after midnight that night.’ Taffy pulled the handkerchief through her fist, clearly lost in her memories.

‘Did that alarm you?’ Hermione asked. ‘Having a stranger come to you?’

Taffy gave a watery chuckle. ‘He wasn’t a stranger,’ she said. ‘He’s my husband’s best friend and was the best man at my wedding—it was a relief to see him, I promise you.’

‘Of course,’ Hermione agreed, seeing how the pieces fit together. ‘That makes perfect sense.’

Taffy continued her story. ‘He insisted that I pack up my necessities and leave with him immediately, upon my husband’s orders, for it was his task to see after me while my husband was unable to do so.’

Hermione tried to imagine the horror of the situation. ‘You must have been very much afraid,’ she said.

Taffy shook her head fiercely. ‘Our mutual friend was stern and comforting at the same time. He told me I had to be brave and have faith that my husband would come back to me. He took me to Hogsmeade, and I became the shop girl at the apothecary’s.’ She smiled grimly. ‘I worked six days a week in the shop and lived in a tiny flat above it, and I was never allowed to tell anyone who I was or where I was from, nor to correspond with my husband—but once a week, I was able to meet with
my husband’s best friend.’

Hermione closed her eyes. All those meetings—the ones Hermione had protested against so ferociously—had been poor Taffy’s only contact with the life she had left behind her. Hermione felt sick with shame that she had been so possessive and untrusting.

‘If our mutual friend had received owl post for me from the prison, he would bring it to me. He would accept my letters and agree to send them to my husband. He would listen to my worries and concerns and the petty annoyances of working as a village shop girl, and he would give me advice and assignments to keep me focussed.’

Hermione frowned. ‘What sort of assignments?’ she asked.

Taffy chuckled again. ‘Not the sort he gave to you,’ she said drolly. ‘Mine were about learning to control my temper with the customers and holding my tongue with the apothecary and his wife.’ She looked frankly into Hermione’s face. ‘He saw me every week for a few hours, Hermione, but there was never a hint of impropriety—it was like having a very strict older brother keeping tabs on me—but oh, he was kind. He understood how I felt to be away from my husband for so long. He was my saviour.’

Hermione looked into the wide blue eyes of Taffy Smith and believed her. Of course Professor Snape would have refused to discuss his best friend’s wife when he was hiding her from Voldemort. What a heavy responsibility for her professor to have to bear … but he rather made a career of bearing such burdens, did he not? Her heart felt as if it contracted in her chest, and she was pierced with an intense stab of want for him.

Then Taffy’s eyes filled with tears again as she said, ‘He’s doubly my saviour, now.’

‘Doubly?’ Hermione asked, perplexed.

‘Of course,’ Taffy said, her face suffused with sudden light. ‘I would do anything for him. He broke my husband out of prison—haven’t you guessed?’

A/N: I know very well how difficult it is to be without the professor for prolonged periods of time, but this telling of the back story is necessary. I’ll try not to give too much at once, but you’ve had loads of questions, haven’t you? Hopefully, I’m answering them. And patience will be rewarded, as you may imagine!
Chapter 43: Roissy House

For the Potions Master’s Amusement

Chapter 43: Roissy House

Hermione gaped at Taffy. ‘But I thought all the prisoners were broken out,’ she said.

Taffy nodded earnestly, dabbing at her eyes with a handkerchief. ‘Oh, they were—and I know it’s silly of me—but I take it as a very personal favour that our mutual friend was the mastermind behind the plan.’

*She’s even more soppy about her Master than I am about mine,* Hermione thought. Keeping her amusement to herself, she said, ‘How do you know he was the mastermind?’

Taffy turned her wide blue eyes to the window, watching the countryside blur by. ‘My husband told me, in a letter—“our clever friend”, he called him.’ She smiled tenderly, apparently lost in remembrances of her husband’s missive.

Hermione shifted a bit impatiently. ‘When will we see them?’ she asked, her need to see Professor Snape’s hawkish countenance a sharp pain behind her breastbone.

Taffy seemed to recollect her surroundings and drew her attention back to Hermione. ‘I will see my husband very soon,’ she said softly. ‘It could be as soon as tonight, or it could be several days. It may be a bit longer before you see our friend.’

Hermione bit her lip, trying not to express her impatience, but Taffy seemed to know her thoughts exactly.

‘I know how difficult it is to wait, Hermione,’ she said, patting her arm comfortingly. ‘It’s just that my husband has been incarcerated for over a year, and he has a good excuse to slip away from You-Know-Who for a bit, to take care of personal business. Whereas your—’ she mouthed *professor* ‘doesn’t have that excuse. It may be a bit longer before he can make an excuse to be absent.’

Hermione couldn’t fault the logic, even if she hated the reality of it. Of course Master Maximus would be allowed time to pick up the threads of his abandoned life more quickly than her professor would be able to get away. She understood it, but she didn’t have to like it. ‘Right,’ she said. ‘Well, where are we going?’

Taffy smiled sweetly. ‘To one of the most wonderful places I’ve ever been,’ she said. ‘If home is the place to which you can return at any time, always knowing you’ll be welcomed with open arms, then it’s home, to me.’

Hermione frowned. ‘Not your parents’ house, surely?’

Taffy chuckled. ‘Oh, no,’ she assured Hermione.
There was a loud *bang!*, and the Knight Bus lurched violently, and they were no longer in the countryside but in the middle of a city. Hermione and Taffy righted themselves, exchanging exasperated glances.

‘I would’ve taken you to London by Floo,’ Taffy said apologetically, ‘but I thought we’d need the time to discuss things before you decide what you want to do.’

Hermione felt irritated and annoyed; travelling by the Knight Bus was enough to make anyone nauseous, and her anxiety was whittling away at her patience. Couldn’t the silly girl get on with it?

Stepping hard on her impatience, Hermione said, ‘Why don’t you explain it to me in detail?’

Taffy settled back in her seat and slipped a short, supple wand of pale wood from her sleeve and gave it wave, murmuring *Muffliato*. ‘It all began twenty years or so ago, when my husband and his friend left school,’ she said, in the tone of one about to tell a fairy tale. ‘They were eighteen, had already joined their exclusive group, and yet they both felt a bit outcast amongst the other followers.’

Hermione tilted her head to one side. ‘But why did they feel outcast?’

Taffy absentmindedly stroked the black fur which edged the hood of her cloak. ‘Your friend was a half-blood, which made his social status questionable,’ she explained. ‘My husband was pure-blood, and his family were all involved in the group, but his heart wasn’t really in it.’ She pursed her lips for a moment. ‘I wish with all my heart he had just left home, but at the time, it didn’t occur to him to go against his family.’

Hermione nodded, wondering just who Taffy’s husband was. It was on the tip of her tongue to ask, but she didn’t want to distract the other girl from the telling of her tale, so she just nodded for Taffy to continue.

‘The city nightlife in those days was not as … specialised then as it is now,’ Taffy said. ‘There were perhaps four pubs in wizarding London, and they were frequented more along age lines—and bloodlines—than along other preferences.’

Hermione frowned. ‘I’m not sure I understand you,’ she said.

Taffy giggled. ‘Well, in wizarding London now, you can find a pub or a club that caters to every taste,’ she explained. ‘There are clubs for gays, for the S and M crowd, for D/s—and plenty of places for vanilla folks to go and pretend they don’t know about the other sort.’

The mischievous grin on Taffy’s face drew an answering grin from Hermione. ‘I see,’ she said, trying to imagine what a D/s club would be like.

‘There was a rather dodgy pub in Knockturn Alley in which our men spent their free evenings. Apparently, the main attraction was cheap drink. There was also a witch who was often there with her escort, and our men were fascinated by the behaviour of this witch. She either sat upon a stool at her companion’s knee or she sat in his lap. She wore clothing which bordered on the provocative, but she never spared a glance for another human being—her attention was all for her escort. They found her manner and her interactions with her companion to be very compelling. Then one night, the woman came to their table and invited them to join her and her escort.’

The Knight Bus jerked to one side with an alarming rattling noise, and they were zooming along the seaside, the winter ocean an uninviting iron grey. Hermione stared at the water, feeling minutely jealous of the submissive whose behaviour had so enchanted her professor.
‘That was how my husband and his best friend made the acquaintance of Hadrian Hunter, the director of Roissy House, in London.’

Hermione cut across her eagerly. ‘Roissy? But that’s the name of the chateau in The Story of O, where O is trained to be a submissive.’

‘Then you’ve been reading on the subject,’ Taffy said with approval. ‘Well, it’s no surprise, really, to see that our friend is properly educating you.’

‘So, does such a place really exist?’ Hermione asked. ‘I understood that O was a fictional character.’

Stan Shunpike toiled up the steps to the second level of the bus, perilously balancing a steaming teapot and two cups on a tray. Hermione watched him without breathing, ready to cast a shield charm should the bus suddenly lurch and send scalding liquid into the air. Thankfully, he made it up to them and set the tray on a small table at Taffy’s elbow. ‘There you go, Miss,’ he said with an admiring look for the fair witch. ‘Sorry it took so long.’

Taffy responded with an angelic smile. ‘Thank you,’ she said, turning to pour hot chocolate into the teacups spangled with pink rosebuds.

The dazzled Stan Shunpike made his way back down the stairs, and Hermione accepted her welcome cup from her companion, amused.

‘I thought we might be glad of something warm to drink,’ Taffy confided, reaching into her handbag and producing a packet of chocolate digestive biscuits. She opened them and offered one to Hermione, a perfect hostess.

Hermione took the biscuit and consumed it thankfully; she had been unable to eat much at breakfast.

‘In answer to your question,’ Taffy said, sipping at her hot chocolate, ‘as far as I know, O is a fictional character. Roissy House was named as homage to the ideal of the chateau in her story.’ She stopped to nibble at a biscuit. ‘I will introduce you to Hadrian, and he will be delighted if you ask him to tell you the history of Roissy House. Let me just say that it was established about forty years ago by people who were serious about living the D/s lifestyle. A trust was established to support the running of the actual house, and there is an advisory group. The head of the advisory group is the live-in director of Roissy House.’

Hermione placed her cup on the table and frowned. ‘I don’t understand,’ she said. ‘Do people live there? What happens there?’

‘It’s a very large house in Mayfair, in London,’ Taffy said. ‘There are many bedrooms, common rooms, receiving rooms, and several spaces set up just like flats. So, some people live there, some people visit for extended periods of time, and there are many who come to stay for the weekend when there is an event.’

Good heavens! Hermione thought. It must be a mansion, if it had that many rooms. How did a group of wizards manage to maintain a low profile in a Mayfair mansion?

‘Of course,’ Taffy added, as if reading Hermione’s mind, ‘Roissy is Secret-Kept, so the Muggles don’t even know it’s there.’ She finished the last of her hot chocolate and put her cup on the tray. ‘As for what happens there, mostly, it’s just everyday living. And once or twice a month, there are social
occasions, like parties, or something special, such as a collaring ceremony.’ She smiled. ‘We really like excuses to get together and show off a bit.’

Hermione was intrigued. ‘How do you go about showing off?’ she asked.

Taffy giggled. ‘You’ll have to wait and see,’ she said.

The Knight Bus careened wildly and banged down in the middle of a posh-looking street.

‘Grosvenor Square, London,’ Stan Shunpike called up the stairs.

‘Are you ready?’ Taffy said, her cheeks suddenly flushed pink with excitement.

Hermione looked wildly out the window. ‘This is our stop?’ she asked, her heart suddenly thumping.

But Taffy was on her feet, hurrying down the stairs, and Hermione followed her. Before she knew what she was about, Hermione was standing on the street with her trunk and Crookshanks’ basket at her feet. Taffy stood serenely beside her with only a small travelling bag in hand. Hermione glanced from left to right, wondering where they were going to go from here—surely they couldn’t stand here so near the United States Embassy without attracting unwanted attention?

Then Taffy grabbed her hand. ‘He’s coming,’ she whispered and nodded her head toward an older gentleman, who approached them with outstretched hands.

‘Welcome!’ he said, his voice low-pitched but brimming with sincerity.

Taffy did not hesitate to step into his embrace, and Hermione watched their emotional greeting. The wizard was silver-haired and blue-eyed, dressed in a fine Muggle overcoat, hatless in the winter air. He patted Taffy’s back, dried her tears with his handkerchief, and whispered something to her before turning to Hermione.

‘So,’ he said, looking directly into her eyes, ‘you are Severus’ Hermione.’

Hermione felt gooseflesh break out on her arms. Though he had said very little, there was something about this man which reminded her forcibly of her Master. ‘Yes, sir,’ she answered, averting her eyes.

He tipped her chin with the slightest pressure of a gloved finger, and as soon as Hermione looked up again, he removed his hand from her face. ‘You’re very courteous,’ he said, ‘and I’m sure Master Severus would be proud of you.’

Hermione flushed; she was entirely unused to having anyone else speak of her Master, and the phenomenon filled her with a mixture of pride and longing.

‘I am Hadrian Hunter,’ the man continued, offering his hand, and Hermione shook it. ‘How do you do?’

‘I’m well, thank you, sir,’ she answered.

Hunter smiled at her, and she saw that his smile reached his eyes, warming their expression. ‘Have you decided if you would like to be our guest while you wait for Master Severus to return?’ he asked her.
'Yes, if you please, sir,' Hermione replied, hoping they would soon move off the open street. She felt entirely too strange in her school cloak to be standing about in Mayfair.

'Then please read and memorise this,' Hadrian Hunter said, passing Hermione a slip of paper. She opened it and read the elegant script.

*The location of Roissy House is number eleven, Grosvenor Square.*

And as the slip of paper disintegrated in her hand, an impressive Georgian edifice seemed to spring from the very bricks of the building before her.

‘Welcome home, Hermione,’ Hadrian Hunter said, nodding to the open door.
Chapter 44: Introductions

Hermione passed into the house, closely followed by Taffy and Hadrian Hunter. The foyer was large and imposing, with marble floors and blindingly white walls. The ceiling bore an elaborate gilded fresco depicting Merlin at the crowning of King Arthur. Staircases curved gracefully down from the first floor gallery, upon which a debutante might stand to be introduced at the inauguration of her first society season. Taffy came alongside Hermione and took her hand, leading her through an elaborate arch and down a few steps into another marble floored hall; on either side were double-doored entrances to receiving rooms decorated in formal style, all jewel-toned velvets and brocade upon priceless Axminster carpets.

‘These are our reception rooms,’ Hadrian said, drawing up on Hermione’s other side. The hallway was wide enough to drive the Knight Bus down the middle without scarring the walls, so they walked three abreast with no crowding. ‘We seldom use them, other than for parties.’

Hermione glanced at him. ‘Do you entertain often?’

He smiled. ‘We tend to have gatherings twice a month or so,’ he said. ‘Of course, the dungeons are below.’

Hermione was startled by this pronouncement, but she didn’t care to ask for elaboration. Why would this posh old Muggle house have a dungeon?

Taffy saw her expression and laughed softly. ‘A dungeon is a playroom,’ she explained. ‘It’s usually equipped with bondage and discipline implements—chains, shackles, crosses, stocks, whips, floggers, clamps—those sorts of things.’

‘I see,’ Hermione murmured. Remembering her own experiences with such things brought a sudden, piercing ache to her chest. She missed her Master so fiercely that it hurt to breathe.

They reached the end of the cold, formal hallway and reached a set of blue painted doors with white enamel panels.

‘This is the part of the house in which we actually live,’ Hadrian said, and he opened both doors with a bit of a flourish, entering first and speaking as he crossed the threshold. ‘I’ve brought them,’ he said cheerfully.

The room was large and bright, lit by a massive chandelier of hundreds of candles and warmed by a roaring fire in the fireplace. The furniture here consisted of squishy couches, armchairs, and poufs, upholstered in chintz, with colourful cushions spread about. There were a few people seated together near the fire, a tea service between them. All faces were raised at Hadrian’s announcement, and
Hermione had a quick impression of welcoming smiles.

Detaching herself from the edge of the group, a silver-haired witch rolled toward them in a moving chair. It was similar to a Muggle electric wheelchair, but Hermione recognised it from her one visit to St Mungo’s Hospital—it was an air chair, and it moved according to the will of its occupant. Stopping right in front of the girls, the witch smiled at them. She wore russet coloured robes over golden silk pyjamas, and upon her feet were ballet slippers of the softest tan leather. Hermione could see that the woman’s legs were wasted in the too-large pyjama bottoms. Taffy bent to kiss the woman’s carefully made-up face, and Hadrian made the introductions.

‘Hermione, I’d like for you to meet my wife, Elinore.’

Hermione accepted the delicate, manicured hand which was extended to her. ‘How do you do, Hermione?’ Elinore said warmly. ‘We love Severus, you know, and even though we’ve just met you, you are very welcome here.’

Hermione looked into the brown eyes of the older witch and knew she was sincere. ‘Thank you,’ Hermione said in a small voice. ‘You’re very kind.’

The others had stood and approached, and they now stood gathered around Elinore’s chair. A middle-aged wizard with blond hair, touched at the temples with white, extended his hand to Hermione.

‘I’m Master Claudius,’ he said in clipped tones.

Hermione shook his hand, noting the lack of warmth in the man’s eyes. ‘Hello,’ she said, briefly clasping his hand.

Master Claudius turned to exchange a polite greeting with Taffy, and two witches stepped forward. One was fair, with long blond hair, and the other was dark, with a cap of shining black hair and grey eyes. The fair witch wore a gold collar set with a large centre diamond. ‘I am Master Claudius’ alpha slave,’ she said in a colourless tone. ‘I’m called Vi—short for Violet.’

Vi hadn’t offered her hand, so Hermione simply smiled and said, ‘Hi.’

The dark-haired girl, who appeared to be only a few years older than Hermione, spoke next. ‘I’m Kelly—call me Kell. I’m in training with Master Claudius and Mistress Vi.’

Hermione couldn’t help smiling at Kell; the other girl’s personality was ebullient, and she exuded friendliness. Her eyes were a bright blue, and she wore a red patent leather collar, which Hermione thought was rather garish—but Kell was obviously very proud of it, as she ought to be. ‘Hi, Kell,’ Hermione said, feeling infinitesimally more cheerful.

‘Hadrian,’ Elinore said, ‘why don’t you have your tea, and I’ll show Hermione to her room, so she can get settled in.’

Taffy elected to have tea with the others, so Hermione found herself accompanying Elinore Hunter through the door at the other end of the room and down a dark panelled hallway to a staircase. ‘Most of the bedrooms are on the first floor,’ Elinore said as her chair levitated and began to float up the staircase, just ahead of Hermione. ‘The suites—apartments with kitchens and sitting rooms—are on the second floor. We have the Claudius family and Reginald Bardulph in residence now, but we expect some friends in this weekend for a casual get-together.’
Elinore turned left at the first floor landing, and Hermione followed her down the quiet hallway to the fourth door on the left. Elinore reached out her hand, and the door obediently swung open. ‘Please,’ she said, ‘I hope you’ll feel very much at home.’

Hermione entered the room, noting the warm fire in the grate with gratitude; as was common with old houses, there were a great many draughts. The room was inviting, with a loveseat and two armchairs arranged about the fireplace, behind which was a large mahogany sleigh bed, covered in a forest green duvet. A tall bookshelf was crammed with leather-bound books. The wardrobe in the corner was quite large, and a half-opened door led to an ensuite bathroom, complete with an old claw-foot bathtub. Hermione’s trunk and Crookshanks’ basket were at the foot of the bed, and Crooks had already made himself at home on the hearthrug, before the crackling fire.

‘This is Severus’ room at Roissy House,’ Elinore said, stroking a hand down the spine of a brown leather book on the shelf. ‘He isn’t with us very often, but I like to keep his room ready for him.’

Hermione opened the wardrobe door, curious, and a fragrant puff of air greeted her, smelling of cedar … and of her professor’s aftershave. ‘Oh!’ she breathed, forgetting she was not alone, and she buried her face in the black robes hanging from the wardrobe rail.

A few moments later, Elinore had detached her from the black fabric redolent of Professor Snape and had persuaded her to sit in an armchair near the fire. Hermione dried her face with the handkerchief Elinore had thoughtfully provided, and the older witch sat very close, patting Hermione comfortably on the arm.

‘What an upset you’ve been through!’ she said bracingly. ‘Your Dominant gone away without warning, school closing, coming away to stay with strangers—it would be enough to unhinge most girls.’

Hermione swallowed and blew her nose. She hated crying in front of this woman, who seemed very kind but was nevertheless a stranger. Everything was so odd and unfamiliar—and then to smell her professor’s particular scent coming from the wardrobe…. Even so, she needed to get a grip.

‘I’ll be fine,’ she said, trying to sound definite.

Elinore patted her arm again and said in a carrying voice, ‘Pitty!’

Hermione scarcely had time to wonder what Elinore meant before a rather scrawny house-elf appeared in the room. The creature wore a royal blue tea towel, embroidered with Pitty in white thread.

‘This is Miss Hermione Granger, Pitty,’ Elinore said. ‘She is Master Severus’ girl, and she’ll be staying with us. You’ll look after her.’

Hermione felt a warm glow from being identified as ‘Master Severus’ girl’, and the house-elf bowed to her deeply.

‘Pitty is proud to serve Miss,’ she proclaimed in a squeaky voice.

‘Bring Miss a sandwich and some tea,’ Elinore instructed Pitty.
Pitty popped out of the room, and Hermione turned to Elinore. ‘Have you known Professor Snape for very long?’ she asked, simply wanting to hear more about him.

‘I’ve known him since he was your age,’ Elinore informed her with a smile. ‘He spent the summer after he left school in training with Hadrian and me.’ Elinore leaned forward slightly, taking from the bookshelf a framed photograph which Hermione had not previously noticed. ‘This was taken then,’ Elinore said, extending the frame to Hermione.

Hermione took the photograph eagerly, her eyes seeking out Professor Snape. He stood in the middle of the grouping, taller than either of his companions, an expression approaching a smile upon his face. His hair was much shorter than he wore it now, leaving more of his face visible. He was thin and gangly, his Adam’s apple prominent, his wrists bony, his hands seeming too large for his body. There was an almost imperceptible aura of happiness about him as he stood between Hadrian and Elinore Hunter. Hadrian’s hair had been a rich auburn, his posture straighter, as he held the boy at his side close to him with a proprietary hand upon his shoulder. Elinore’s hair had been a deep ash brown, flowing down almost to her waist; she had been quite petite, shorter in stature than Hermione was, and in the picture, she stood with both arms wrapped about young Severus Snape’s waist, her face tilted adoringly up to his. Picture Snape looked from Elinore to Hadrian and back to the camera; Elinore would throw a sly smile to the camera before returning her eyes to the face of the boy; Hadrian smiled proudly at his companions before turning back to the camera, waving with his free hand.

Hermione stared, trying to find in the face of the boy some trace of the austere, controlled man she knew. He seemed completely at ease with the Hunters, one arm about Hadrian’s shoulders, the other curving down to Elinore’s waist. Hermione felt a twinge of jealousy as picture Snape soaked up the affection of his companions, a slightly cocky swagger evident in his bearing.

‘He was … in training with you?’ she echoed stupidly, wanting more information but hesitant to ask for it, lest she seem rude.

Elinore nodded. ‘Hadrian knew immediately that Severus had the makings of an excellent Dominant, but his … interpersonal skills were lacking.’ She smiled at Hermione’s minute nod. ‘Yes, he still struggles in that area,’ Elinore said dryly. ‘Severus’ home life had not given him much experience of receiving and returning affection in a respectful and caring way. Hadrian felt that a summer of servitude would give Severus a crash course in what it meant to be submissive.’

Her eyes took on a meditative look, and several seconds passed. Hermione watched the older witch, her brain seething. Her Master had been trained as a submissive? What did that even mean? Had he had sex with Hadrian Hunter? Was he bisexual? Or had Elinore dominated him?

‘Ma’am,’ she said diffidently, ‘could you explain more to me about that? About how he was … trained?’

Elinore turned back with a smile. ‘Forgive me, Hermione; I forgot that you’re a novice in the lifestyle.’ She tilted her head to one side. ‘Not all Dominant men go through formal training, but in my opinion, the best ones do. Most of the training has to do with self-discipline, self-denial, psychological domination, and instruction regarding the psychology of the submissive personality.’ She cupped her hands together before her heart. ‘We submissives give our hearts and souls to the Master whom we serve—it is imperative that the Master understand the internal motivations, wants, and needs of the submissive who trusts him with the essence of her very being.’

Hermione’s lips parted, and she leaned forward impulsively. ‘You said it perfectly!’ she said. ‘That’s
how I am with him—exactly how I feel.’

Elinore smiled tenderly. ‘Of course it is,’ she said, patting Hermione’s cheek. ‘And I know for a fact that Severus is an intuitive, gifted, and skilled Dominant—his training methods are exemplary. He will prepare you for a life of happy submission with some lucky Master, my dear.’

Hermione shook her head. ‘I don’t want some other Master,’ she said. ‘I only want him—I’ll always want him.’

Elinore clasped her hand, her face a mask of compassion. ‘I understand the way you feel,’ the older witch assured her. ‘But Severus has always placed the girls he’s trained with other Dominants.’

Pitty popped back into the room with a tray, placing it on a table before bustling forward with a napkin, which she spread over Hermione’s lap. Elinore turned away, and the magic chair began to float toward the door. ‘You enjoy your tea,’ she commanded kindly, ‘and have a bath and a nap. Dinner is at six. Taffy will come for you and show you where the dining room is.’

With a stormy expression on her face, Hermione watched the silver-haired woman go. She wanted to argue that her Master had already chosen her—she wore his collar, didn’t she?—but her bare throat made that rather difficult to argue. Confused and still unsettled, she dutifully ate her roast beef sandwich and drank her tea before lying down on the sleigh bed and having a long nap.

Taffy came to find her at half-five, dressed in a white gown reminiscent of a Grecian goddess, and advised her on what to wear to dinner.

‘We usually dress for dinner at Roissy,’ she said rather unnecessarily. ‘Do you have anything dressy?’

Hermione produced dress robes and frowned at them.

‘Oh dear,’ Taffy said, looking at the navy blue serge.

‘I have this,’ Hermione said, dropping the serge robes and pulling out her dress from the Yule Ball. It seemed so long ago, but it had been less than a month since the night she had worn this dress and driven her Master to grope her in a grotto.

‘Pretty,’ Taffy said, admiring the bronze evening dress.

Hermione scrambled into it and allowed Taffy to coil her hair into an up-do. When she rose from the dressing table to leave the room, she walked across the floor with her head high, knowing that she looked her best. Her legs were revealed to mid-thigh in their silky stockings with each step she took, and she felt good.

Taffy stopped her at the door. ‘My husband loves to show me off when we go out together,’ she said, her eyes on the split skirt of Hermione’s overdress, ‘but when he’s away from me, he likes for me to dress much more conservatively.’ She indicted the pretty but demure cut of her evening dress. ‘Would Severus want you to go among other Dominants without him, wearing a dress that shows off your legs like that?’
Hermione looked down at the overdress. ‘Probably not,’ she admitted. ‘He’s never said so, precisely …’

‘But it’s better to err on the side of caution,’ Taffy finished for her, and both girls laughed.

With a frown of concentration and a wave of her wand, Taffy sealed the split in the skirt, and the two went down together to dinner.

‘We’ll be in the family dining room tonight,’ Taffy explained, leading Hermione downstairs. ‘We have a much larger one we use when we have a party.’

The family dining room was an elegant chamber, brightly lit with candles and furnished with a long mahogany table. The others Hermione had met that afternoon were already seated, and there was one additional man, who rose when Hermione and Taffy entered.

‘Hullo, Reg,’ Taffy said, allowing the handsome man with short, curly brown hair to kiss her cheek. ‘This is Hermione,’ she added, turning to give Hermione a reassuring smile. ‘Hermione, this is Reggie Bardulph.’

Hermione had the impression that Reggie was eyeing her up, even though his frank hazel eyes never left her face. ‘Charmed, Hermione,’ he said, inclining his head respectfully, but making no move to touch her. ‘So, you’re training with Severus, are you?’

Taffy urged Hermione along the table and indicated where she should sit. Hermione slipped into her place, sitting between Kelly and Taffy, and didn’t answer Reggie’s question. After all, it was obvious, wasn’t it? Everyone here knew she was Professor Snape’s girl, and she had no problem with being thus labelled. She was a girl, he was her first serious love affair, and she was tingling with pride to be recognised as his.

Dinner was quite good, for a slightly more sophisticated palate than the fare at Hogwarts. She allowed the conversation to swirl around her without attempting to participate, and few remarks were directed to her. She found herself thinking with longing of Hogwarts, where she had lived the best part of the last seven years, and for the first time, she missed Harry and Ron. Where were her best friends, in the wide, dangerous world? What were they eating? Were they warm enough? Were they safe? And couldn’t she wonder the very same things about her Master? Truth to tell, the three people whom she loved the most in the world were Merlin-knew-where, and Hermione felt completely useless to them all. With a sudden plunge of mood, sadness filled her, and she pushed her crème brulée away after only a few bites. She couldn’t eat rich puddings when her dear ones might not have enough to eat—it was just wrong.

‘Are you all right?’

Hermione glanced over to Kell, who was leaning toward her and speaking sotto voce.

‘Fine,’ she said, feeling a lump rise in her throat even as she spoke.

‘I expect you’re missing him,’ Kell said sympathetically.

‘Do you know him?’ Hermione asked, her voice rough in spite of her efforts to control her emotions.

‘I’ve not met him,’ Kell admitted, ‘but I know he’s on the Board of Directors for Roissy House. And there are pictures of him in the Hunters’ suite.’ Discreetly, Kell Transfigured her linen napkin to a
handkerchief and passed it to Hermione beneath the table. ‘I expect you’re fond of him,’ she said.

The odd comment startled a choked chuckle from Hermione, drawing a smiling glance from Hadrian, who then continued his conversation with Master Claudius.

‘Aren’t you fond of … yours?’ Hermione asked, wiping at her cheeks. Sweet Circe, when had she become such a watering pot? She had cried more since becoming entangled with Severus Snape than she had cried in the whole rest of her adolescence.

Kell gave a tiny shake of her head. ‘I’m respectful,’ she said. ‘I’m thankful to have someone willing to train me.’ She gave a twisted smile. ‘I’m a bit of a problem case,’ she admitted.

Before Hermione could inquire further, people began to rise from the table. Elinore and Vi left the room together, each on the way to her own suite, and the three men removed to the Dominants’ Study. That left Kell, Taffy, and Hermione to move into the sitting room. When they were sitting together on the sofa nearest the fire, Hermione asked the question on the tip of her tongue.

‘How are you a problem case, Kell?’ she asked.

Kell made a rueful face. ‘I’ve been released from training by two Masters already,’ she admitted.

‘Heavens!’ Taffy said, her blue eyes wide.

From Taffy’s reaction, Hermione knew this was unusual, but she couldn’t tell if Taffy was impressed or horrified.

‘Yeah,’ Kell said. ‘If Hadrian hadn’t intervened on my behalf, they might have put me out of the community.’

‘But why?’ Taffy asked, aghast. ‘I’ve never heard of such a thing before!’

Kell shrugged, and Hermione could tell the other girl was embarrassed. ‘I’m a brat,’ Kell admitted. ‘Even when my Dominant has told me I’m absolutely, under no circumstances, not to do something, I can’t seem to help myself.’

Hermione frowned. ‘But surely every submissive in training does that at some time or another?’ she said.

‘They do,’ Taffy said, watching Kell with speculative eyes, ‘but eventually, the Dominant draws a line that you cannot cross and still claim to be submissive.’

Kell nodded solemnly. ‘Yep,’ she said. ‘And I pushed two Dominants to dismiss me from training.’

Hermione felt a thump of sympathy. ‘Were you … fond of either of them?’

Kell’s lips pressed together and suddenly, tears were sparkling on her dark lashes. ‘Yeah, I was,’ she said.

Hermione felt that any further questions would be intrusive, so she kept quiet, and the three submissives sat in silence, each lost in thought about the Dominant wizards they loved. Finally, Kell swiped at her eyes with the back of her hand and sat forward, turning to the other two girls with an expression of determined cheerfulness. ‘So, when I was released the second time, Hadrian offered to
place me with a Master. He made it clear to me that it was my absolute last chance, and that if I blew it again, I was out. Master Claudius and Mistress Vi agreed to take me on, and so far, it’s working really well.’ She wrinkled her nose. ‘We spend loads of time on self-discipline and self-denial.’ She sighed so theatrically that Hermione could only laugh.

‘You must really, really want to be a submissive,’ she said.

Kell turned to her with a completely sober look on her frequently animated face. ‘With all my heart and soul and mind,’ she admitted, and Taffy reached to take her hand sympathetically.

‘Is Vi really a Dominant?’ Hermione asked curiously.

‘No,’ Taffy answered, releasing Kell’s hand and settling back against the sofa cushions again. ‘I’ve known Claudius and Vi since I first came here. Vi is as submissive as I am—but it’s not uncommon for a D/s couple to take on a submissive for training. The collared submissive has authority over the trainee, but she isn’t, by nature, a Dominant person.’

The sitting room door opened, and Reggie Bardulph strolled in, a lit cigar in his hand.

‘Put that thing out, Reg!’ Taffy scolded. ‘You know Elinore doesn’t permit smoking outside the Dominant’s Study!’

Reg made a face at Taffy and tossed the cigar into the fire. ‘Hadrian and Claudius are playing Wizard’s Chess, and you know how brutal Claudius’ chess men are—it’s a bloody battlefield in there.’

Suddenly, Kell stood, drawing everyone’s attention. Hermione noticed that her cheeks were flushed, but she didn’t meet anyone’s eye. ‘I’m off to bed,’ she said hurriedly. ‘Good night!’

Hermione watched her go with some concern, but Reggie laughed. ‘Claudius won’t permit her to be in a room with me unless he’s present,’ he said lazily.

‘Honestly, Reg,’ Taffy said indignantly. ‘Why did you come in, then?’

‘Because I’m not nice to bratty subs,’ he said, seating himself in an armchair across from their sofa and stretching his legs out before him. ‘Besides, I want to catch up with you, old thing,’ he added with an undeniably charming smile at Taffy. ‘I haven’t seen you in forever. How have you been?’

‘I’ve been separated from my husband and living in hiding,’ Taffy answered tartly. ‘How do you think I’ve been?’

Hermione paid scarce attention to Taffy and Reggie as they bantered. The wine she had drunk at dinner was now making her terribly sleepy, but she couldn’t make herself stir from this warm place before the fire.

‘Come along to your bed, sleepyhead,’ Taffy’s voice said, and Hermione startled awake.

‘Sorry,’ she muttered, rubbing her eyes.

‘It’s no wonder,’ Taffy reassured her. ‘It’s been a difficult few days for you.’ She stood and Hermione followed suit.
‘Good night, fair damsels,’ Reggie said, standing and giving an exaggerated bow. Hermione nodded to him, and he spoke again. ‘Perhaps we’ll have time to get acquainted on another occasion, Hermione,’ he said.

Hermione followed obediently in Taffy’s wake, wanting nothing but her bed.

Morning brought Pitty and a tray of tea and toast. On the tray was a letter written on rose-coloured parchment in gold ink. Curious, she broke the seal on the letter and began to read as she sipped her tea.

Dear Hermione,

Jacquie and I will be in London today for a bit of shopping, and we wanted to come by and welcome you to the community. We share with you the distinction of being the only students Professor Snape ever mentored into the lifestyle. If it will be convenient for you, we’ll drop by your room for tea at around three o’clock this afternoon.

In Anticipation,

Diana and Jacqueline

Hermione replaced her teacup on the tray and picked up a piece of buttered toast. So, she was going to meet the two submissives Professor Snape had mentored before her at Hogwarts? How strange that they shopped together and paid visits together! Would she, then, become a member of their club—would she one day be accompanying them to visit the professors next ‘girl’?

She pushed the tray aside and stood. She couldn’t bear to think such thoughts. Opening the wardrobe, she took her professor’s robes from the rail and buried her nose in them, permitting herself to stand, rocking gently to and fro and breathing his essence until Taffy came by to invite her down to breakfast.

Taffy went shopping with Vi after breakfast, and Hermione and Kell were the only ones who came to the dining room for lunch that day. Over steaming bowls of onion soup, accompanied by thick slabs of fresh baked bread, Kell and Hermione chatted.

‘Oh, I know who you are,’ Kell said. ‘You’re Harry Potter’s friend—you were always getting into scrapes with him, weren’t you?’

Hermione shrugged, and Kell laughed.

‘My parents sent me to school in France—I was in Fleur Delacour’s year—but not nearly good enough to make the short list for the Triwizard Tournament. Still, we kept up with all the goings-on over here.’
Hermione drank from her pumpkin juice, then she asked hesitantly, ‘Kell, do you know Jacqueline and Diana?’

Kell nodded. ‘I’ve met them, sure—we’re a small community, really, when you get right down to it. They were trained by Master Severus too, weren’t they?’

‘Yes,’ Hermione admitted, wishing she felt more confident about the meeting to come. ‘They’ll be here for tea in my room this afternoon.’

Kell took a final drink of milk and stood, grabbing a large apple from the bowl on the sideboard. ‘Well, I have a three-thousand word essay due tonight, and I’ve only managed five hundred words, so far,’ she said with a grimace. ‘Enjoy your tea party!’

Hermione smiled, feeling a remote ache for her journal, in which she had written her assignments for her professor’s reading pleasure. ‘Thanks, and good luck with your essay,’ she called to Kell’s retreating back. Then she wiped her mouth and set off in search of Pitty to order a tea service for three.

At three o’clock, she opened the door of her room and stepped back to allow her visitors to enter.

‘Hi!’ they said in unison, and Hermione was treated to the sight of her professor’s first two student submissives.

They were so alike that they might have been sisters. In their stiletto-heeled green dragon-hide boots, they stood as tall as Professor Snape; Hermione estimated their height in their stocking feet at no less than five feet ten inches. They were redheads, with shining straight hair hanging to their shoulder blades. One of them had hazel eyes and the other had blue eyes, or Hermione might never have been able to tell them apart. They were both pretty without being beautiful, slender, small-breasted and slim-hipped. And each of them wore about her throat a platinum band edged with tiny diamonds.

They hadn’t even introduced themselves, and already, Hermione was having to fight the impulse to hate them.

The visitors set their carrier bags down and removed their coats and gloves, each of them looking Hermione over as if she were on the auction block.

The blue-eyed one stepped forward and held out her hand. ‘I’m Jacquie,’ she said. ‘How do you do?’

The hazel-eyed one came up impulsively. ‘I’m Diana, but it’s silly to stand on ceremony—we have Severus in common!’ And she enveloped Hermione in a hug redolent of expensive perfume.

Tactfully disentangling herself from Diana, she indicated the tea tray on the table before the loveseat. ‘Do you take milk and sugar?’ she asked politely.

When they were all settled with their tea and scones—the redheads side-by-side on the loveseat and Hermione in an armchair—the questioning began.
‘How on earth did you get started with him?’ Jacquie asked avidly, her blue eyes sparkling. ‘He’s so hard to … entice,’ she added with a sly look at Diana.

Diana gurgled laughter. ‘I don’t know if we would ever have known about him—or about ourselves—if he hadn’t caught us in the Prefects’ Bath that night.’

‘Caught you?’ Hermione said, finding herself, against her will, to be quite charmed by her visitors.

‘Yes,’ Diana said. ‘I was sitting on the edge of the pool and Jacquie was in the water, eating me out.’

Hermione stilled in shock, her eyes darting from one girl to the other.

‘She had her hands in my hair and was moaning louder than Myrtle when he swept into the bathroom and ordered us out of the pool.’ Jacquie took a bite of her scone.

‘But—but what was he doing in the Prefects’ Bathroom?’ Hermione asked indignantly, thinking of all the times she had been in there.

‘Well,’ Diana said, ‘we weren’t prefects, you see—and he’d caught us trying to get in there one night and given us both detention for it.’

‘It was rather embarrassing, but I didn’t care,’ Jacquie added. ‘He was magnificent—so commanding!—I scrambled out of the water and fell to my knees at his feet.’

Diana laughed heartily. ‘And I was too shocked to be able to think, so I just copied Jacquie. There we were, naked and wet, kneeling at his feet.’

Hermione was riveted. ‘What did he do?’

Jacquie smirked. ‘Nothing good,’ she said dryly. ‘Ordered us to his office the next day and stormed off.’

‘But …’ Hermione gave her head a small shake. ‘If you were already a couple …’

Diana leaned forward and poured more tea. ‘If we were a couple already, what did we need with him?’ she said, putting Hermione’s thought into words.

Hermione nodded mutely, her tea forgotten.

‘We’re bi,’ Jacquie said airily. ‘And if we hadn’t knelt for him, I don’t think it would have occurred to him to—’

‘Because he’d never mentored a student before,’ Diana interrupted.

Jacquie nodded sombrely. ‘It was a real struggle for him,’ she said. ‘He was torn between his duties as a teacher and as a Dominant, but he decided if someone didn’t take us in hand we’d run completely wild.’

Diana grinned. ‘He was right, of course.’

Hermione took up the teapot and refilled their cups, completing the hostessing duties automatically while her mind whirled with all the new information. These women were gorgeous—taller, thinner,
prettier, naughtier—how in the world could she ever hope to satisfy Professor Snape when he had experienced D/s with bisexual goddesses?

‘So,’ Diana said, ‘we’re doing all the talking—and we will, if you don’t stop us—but we want to hear about you.’ She smiled engagingly. ‘How did you start with him?’

Hermione tucked a hank of bushy hair behind her ear. ‘He knocked me to the floor and pinned me there,’ she said, staring at the slightly frayed cuff of her robes, feeling like a duck amongst swans. ‘Then he realised it was me and let me up and said scathing things to me. I had been trying to get his approval for years. He challenged me to stand in one spot all night without moving, and I did it.’

Neither of her auditors spoke, and she looked up to find them staring at her, their mouths slightly agape in matching ovals.

‘Then what happened?’ Diana finally asked.

‘He ignored me completely for three weeks,’ Hermione said.

‘Sounds just like him,’ Jacquie muttered darkly.

‘So I exploded my cauldron in Potions class.’

‘You didn’t!’ Diana gasped. She turned to Jacquie, and the two of them burst out laughing.

Hermione grinned uncertainly. ‘Yes, I did,’ she said. ‘So he ordered me into his office and demanded to know why.’

‘What did you tell him?’ Diana asked.

‘That I did it to get his attention,’ Hermione said, remembering how he had responded to that.

‘Look at her face!’ Jacquie said to her partner. ‘Oh my God, he did it to you then, didn’t he?’

Hermione flushed. ‘He invited me into his study and spanked me.’

Diana had abandoned her tea cup and was fanning herself with a serviette from the tray. ‘And?’ she asked.

Hermione looked down. ‘Yes,’ she said, ‘and.’

The other girls sagged back against the loveseat cushions. ‘Damn,’ Jacquie said, ‘that’s hot.’

Diana had another thought. ‘Hermione,’ she said, ‘has he kissed you—on the mouth, I mean?’

‘Yes,’ Hermione admitted.

Diana jabbed her friend with an elbow. ‘See? I told you!’

Jacquie sat forward. ‘He never kissed either of us,’ she said. ‘He watched us kiss each other plenty of times …’

‘While he wanked,’ Diana said smugly.
'But that wasn’t until later,’ Jacquie pointed out. ‘That wasn’t until just before we left school—for months and months and months we weren’t even sure if he had a cock.’

‘Oh, we knew he did,’ Diana objected. ‘The monster tented his trousers often enough.’

She and Jacquie chuckled reminiscently, and Hermione looked between them, amazed. He hadn’t kissed them?

‘Did he ever … take you to bed with him?’ she asked, skirting around the issue.

‘You mean fuck us?’ Jacquie said. ‘Good God, no.’

‘No matter how much we begged,’ Diana added gloomily. ‘He said it would be inappropriate.’

Hermione flushed and busied herself with pouring another cup of tea, but her visitors were not fooled.

‘Oh my God,’ Diana said. ‘He’s fucking you, isn’t he?’

Hermione didn’t answer her. She took a sip of the tea, just for something to do. It occurred to her that she ought not to be speaking to these women about her Master. Oh, why hadn’t she thought about it?

‘Hermione,’ Jacquie said, and she crossed to the armchair, kneeling down so she could look up into Hermione’s averted face. ‘You know about subbies, right? We’re all sisters—especially if we’ve served the same Dom. We would never do or say anything to get you in trouble.’

Diana was on her other side now. ‘We won’t gossip about you and Severus,’ she promised. ‘It just took us by surprise—he never unbent with us, not until the very end, and that was just a couple of times.’

Hermione swallowed and nodded, not knowing what to say.

‘He’s so restrained,’ Jacquie said. ‘We used to wonder what it would be like if he ever let go.’

Hermione closed her eyes, but she couldn’t prevent the smile which touched her lips. ‘It’s like an earthquake inside a typhoon, wrapped in a tidal wave,’ she said.

There was movement on either side of her and kisses were pressed to each cheek. ‘Good for you,’ Diana said. ‘He needs someone to unbend with—I’m glad he’s doing it with you.’

Hermione opened her eyes and raised her face, feeling better about things, now. He had never kissed them—never taken them to his bed—never put his cock in their cunts—he belonged to her in ways they had never had him. She held the knowledge to herself like a mantle of assurance.

‘So, after you left school, you found your Masters?’ she asked them.

‘Our Master—singular,’ Diana corrected her. ‘Master Robert is wonderful.’

Jacquie reached for her hand, and Diana laced her fingers with those of her friend and lover. ‘He understands us completely,’ she said. ‘We’re all very happy together.’
Diana said, ‘Severus found him for us. He came to London and spent a couple of months that summer vetting candidates—’

Jacquie interrupted, ‘And keeping a very stern watch over us, making sure we behaved ourselves here, at Roissy House.’

Diana leaned toward Hermione, a smile on her carefully coloured lips. ‘He’ll do the same for you, Hermione,’ she assured her.

Hermione glanced away from them, feeling that she was, indeed, extremely weary of people telling her what her Master thought and felt and what he would do. Did they honestly believe, all these people, that they knew him better than his own submissive did?

‘Uh oh,’ Jacquie said. ‘You haven’t got too attached to him, have you?’

‘No,’ Hermione replied shortly, still not meeting their eyes.

‘Oh, honey,’ Diana said. ‘You’re not in love with him?’

Hermione’s chin rose, and she turned blazing brown eyes on the other women. ‘What if I am?’ she said dangerously. ‘Whose business is it but mine?’

Jacquie looked thoughtful. ‘Well, what has he told you about when you leave school?’

Hermione flipped her hair behind her shoulders. ‘He used to say he would write me a letter of introduction to the D/s community in London,’ she said.

‘Used to say?’ Diana queried. ‘Does he say something different now?’

Hermione stood jerkily and began to pace. ‘He collared me.’

Diana gasped, but Jacquie said, ‘You’re not wearing a collar.’

Hermione’s fingers strayed to her throat, and in a flash, tears were running down her cheeks. ‘I know!’ she sobbed. ‘I kept it on a peg in his study—and he went off, and the rooms sealed themselves, and I couldn’t get to my collar or my journal!’

She was wrapped up in comforting arms, her hair stroked, her back patted, her cheeks dried, and soothing words were murmured into her ears. ‘Don’t fret … I’m sure you’ll get your collar back … He’ll come for you soon …’

When Hermione was calm, the carriage clock on the mantel chimed five o’clock. ‘We have to fly,’ Diana said, beginning to pull on her coat. ‘Promise me that if we can do anything for you, you’ll let us know.’

Hermione walked them to the door, and Jacquie turned at the last moment, resting fingertips on Hermione’s bare throat. ‘Don’t tell anyone until you have your collar and can wear it,’ she cautioned. ‘Severus hasn’t told anyone, because Hadrian and Elinore don’t know, and he would have told them if he told anyone.’ She gave Hermione a one-armed hug. ‘I just don’t want someone to call you a liar to your face—everyone knows Severus has always sworn he would never collar a submissive until he was ready to retire from teaching.’
‘I won’t tell anyone,’ Hermione promised, and she stood in the doorway watching her visitors until they turned to climb downstairs and were lost to her sight.

Hermione was deeply rattled by her conversation with Diana and Jacquie. She was torn between feeling glad that her relationship with the professor was more intimate than the one he had shared with his first two submissives and feeling inadequate in comparison to their beauty and savoir faire.

She was too unsettled to face the others at dinner, so she sent notes via Pitty to Taffy and Elinore, saying she wasn’t hungry. She was curled up on the loveseat with a book from her professor’s shelves when there was a knock at her door.

‘Come in,’ she invited.

The door opened and Elinore’s chair floated in. ‘How are you feeling, my dear?’ the older witch asked kindly.

‘Fine, thanks,’ Hermione answered awkwardly.

‘I wish you would come to the sitting room for a few minutes,’ Elinore said coaxingly.

Hermione set her book to one side. She didn’t want to go down, but how could she say no? She was a guest here, after all.

‘All right,’ she said.

Elinore smiled. ‘Thank you!’ she said, and her chair revolved in the air to lead the way downstairs.

Hermione couldn’t miss the air of anticipation among the inhabitants of the sitting room. She looked from one face to the next, and everyone seemed to be darting frequent glances to the clock and the door. The only person unaffected by it all was Taffy, who stared moodily into the fire, lost in her own thoughts.

Hermione crossed the room and sat down beside Taffy, nodding politely to the greetings she received from the others. Kell slanted a wink at her from her place on the floor at Master Claudius’ feet. There was little conversation, and Hermione wondered why Elinore had insisted she come down.

She picked up a copy of Witch Weekly from a table and began to leaf through it, shaking her head at the article titles. She frowned, trying to read “How to Keep Your Wizard in Stitches”, which was accompanied by a wizarding photograph of a handsome man laughing uproariously. She was only in the second paragraph when there was a clatter in the hallway and the double doors were thrown open.

A man entered precipitously and paused just inside the door to look about the room. He was quite tall —taller even than Professor Snape—with wavy dark hair, liberally streaked with grey. His face bore the remnants of former good looks, but he was rather gaunt and grey of complexion. He wore well-tailored robes, but they hung on him, as if they had been made for a larger man.

All heads jerked up when he entered, but it was Taffy who spoke first.
'Rafe!' she cried, standing and stumbling across the room towards the newcomer.

He did not speak, but advanced quickly to catch her up in his arms. The two clung to one another, whispered words interspersed between desperate kisses, until Taffy was sobbing against his chest. Everyone had risen, and when he looked up from the trembling witch in his arms, the others approached him, shaking his free hand, slapping him on the back, speaking words of welcome.

Hermione hung back, not wanting to intrude, though her glance continued to move past Taffy’s husband, hoping to see another dark figure coming down the marble-tiled hallway. After a time, the newcomer looked directly into Hermione’s eyes. He whispered something to Taffy, and the two of them walked across to Hermione.

‘I’m Rafe Lestrange,’ he said, offering his hand. ‘You must be Hermione.’

‘How do you do?’ she said, looking up into Rafe Lestrange’s face. Hearing the name, she had recoiled; only the belief that this man was her Master’s best friend allowed her to meet his gaze.

‘Yes,’ he said, as if he knew her thoughts, ‘I’m the other brother—Rodolphus and Rabastan get all the press.’ He smiled, and his dark eyes crinkled with merriment, and for a moment, Hermione thought she saw a glimpse of her professor’s sense of humour in this burly man.

He released Hermione’s hand and delved into his pocket, extracting a package addressed with Hermione’s name in achingly familiar spiky script. ‘I come bearing gifts,’ he said, putting the package into Hermione’s hands.

She sat down suddenly on the sofa, for her knees seemed too weak to hold her. With trembling hands, she ripped the brown paper from the package, revealing a sealed letter, written on parchment edged in darkest forest green—the parchment she had given him as a Christmas gift. Hastily, she stowed the missive in her pocket and opened the box.

Within, she found what appeared to be a piece of her emerald green blanket from the professor’s study—and wrapped in its folds, she found her green leather journal, which she snatched up and held to her chest. Now she could communicate with her Master! Oh, thank Merlin!

‘You missed something,’ Rafe said.

‘Hermione—look!’ Taffy said, her voice still shaky.

Reaching amongst the folds of the blanket, Hermione extracted her black leather collar, the silver disk bearing the entwined SS shining in the candlelight. A note had been tied to the buckle, inscribed with her professor’s handwriting. Somehow, he had got into his quarters, reclaimed these things for her, and sent them to her by his most trusted friend. The knowledge filled her heart so full that she felt she could scarcely draw breath. Lifting the note, she read what he had written:

_To be worn every minute of every day you reside in Roissy House—SS_

She didn’t realise she had read the note out loud until the other occupants of the room began to speak
in whispers. Taffy had taken the collar from Hermione’s numb fingers, and lifting the bushy hair to one side, had begun to fasten the collar in place for her when someone finally spoke aloud.

‘Hermione—has Severus *collared* you?’ Hadrian Hunter asked in disbelieving tones.

‘Hell yeah, he did,’ Rafe answered smugly, looking at Hermione wearing Severus Snape’s collar, as proudly as if Rafe had accomplished the impossible himself.

A/N: I know you have all conjectured that Taffy’s husband is a canon Death Eater—and I believe Avery would have made a good choice if I had gone that way—but once Rafe Lestrange invaded my consciousness, I knew he had to be the one.
Chapter 45: The Return of Professor Snape

For the Potions Master’s Amusement

Chapter 45: The Return of Professor Snape

When the door closed behind her, Hermione felt herself sagging just a bit in relief. Her back pressed to the door, she lifted her fingers to her collar and closed her eyes, breathing deeply. The looks on their faces! It had been such a high, after enduring all the condescending assurances that everyone in residence knew her Master better than she did, to have no less a personage than Master Maximus himself inform them all that Hermione was the collared submissive of Severus Snape.

Without opening her eyes, her fingers stole into her pocket, and she withdrew the sealed letter which had been wrapped up with her box of treasures. She passed the parchment beneath her nose, but she could detect no scent of him on the paper. Moving away from the door, she sat down on an armchair before the fire and broke the seal on the letter, her hands trembling.

little one,

I hope this missive finds you well. If the thing was done as planned, Rafe delivered your collar to you in the presence of the denizens of Roissy House, and your status is now clear to all. I am very pleased that you accepted the arrangements I made on your behalf in the event of our unplanned separation. You are, by now, aware of the nature of my situation. I will continue on as I am until all is finished. If something should prevent my return to you, first Rafe, then Hadrian, have been entrusted with seeing after you. You may, of course, choose to return to your parents’ home. Continuation in the lifestyle does not require residence at Roissy House, but extreme discretion is necessary to safeguard its inhabitants. For now, until the matter at hand has been resolved, it is my wish that you remain where you are, for you will be safe there.

In the natural order of things, I would have instructed you most carefully in the protocol of visiting at Roissy House before taking you there. Because our plans were disrupted, you have been ill-prepared for your sojourn. It will please me greatly if you will seek out instruction from t or Elinore to discover how you are to go on amongst the people you will meet on party weekends. I fully expect you to acquit yourself well and to make me proud of you.

In general, you are to be unfailingly respectful of the Dominants whom you will encounter at Roissy House. If you are introduced, you may make eye contact and a small curtsy. If you are not introduced or if the Dominant does not speak to you first, then do not initiate conversation. Your collar should protect you from the unwanted attentions of other men. If someone is so rude as to contravene that rule, seek out the company of Hadrian. He will soon set all to rights.

Above all, be assured that you have my full confidence. I am completely convinced that you will conduct yourself at every turn in such a way as to make me proud to be your Master. When I come for you, whether for a visit or to carry you away for good, I am sure I will hear nothing but good of you from my friends. Until that time, you are permitted to comfort yourself with pleasure as you will. You may avail yourself of your toys, your hands, the water spray—any implement with which you may bring yourself to orgasm is permissible for you to use. You must continue to apprise me of each
occurrence, as per your previous instructions, as well as continuing to record your sleep, your food, and your revision. It would not be at all remiss for you to write an account of each day you spend at Roissy House. If I have the chance, I will write to you via your journal. If I do not, be assured that I am reading what you write with thorough attention.

If the opportunity arises, I will visit you. Until then, be a good girl.

Your Master,

SS

P.S. It might not be remiss to spend extra time revising in Ancient Runes.

Hermione sat staring at the parchment, hearing in her mind his voice speaking the words he had written. Even seeing his handwriting was an event for her, bringing back the ache she frequently experienced, a heat between her thighs which translated as well to a longing in her heart that could not be quenched. Still, she had his permission now to relieve herself, and she set the letter aside, standing and locking her door before disrobing and resuming her place before the fire.

Lightly, she ran her hands over her breasts, remembering his pleasure in their shape and softness. Stroking her nipples to peaks, she then utilised pressure on each side, imagining his arousal when he applied her clamps—it never failed to make him hard when she endured pain for him. The twin aches in her breasts stoked the fire below, increasing the slick want in her quim. Still, she held off, maintaining the pressure on her nipples, determined to endure it for him as if he were watching her. The idea that he might be doing so coaxed an audible moan from her throat, the memory of his cock, swollen and needy, liquefying her very core—sweet Merlin, how she needed him! At last, she stroked her hands down her torso to her labia, parting the lips with the fingers of her left hand, while the fingers of her right slid against her clitoris. She arched into her own touch, wanting to prolong the pleasure—but it had been a few days, and her need was great. With no restriction to prevent her from doing so, she rubbed her clitoris in a circle until she cried out, collapsing limply on the cushions.

Wrapping her arms around herself, she pressed her face to the arm of the chair, wondering when another hand than her own would touch her again. She reminded herself that she was in his own room—he might very well have sat in this chair before—and she was oddly comforted.

She stood and went to the wardrobe, taking down a warm nightdress, and retrieving her journal and the bit of her blanket from the box, she climbed into the bed and took out her quill. Lovingly, she riffled through the pages until she reached the ones upon which she had not written. Dipping her quill in the ink stand, she began to write.

The next morning, she found her way down to breakfast on her own. It was, perhaps, not surprising that t and her husband did not appear for the meal. Kell was present, but spent the meal sitting silently at Master Claudius’ feet. She kept her face averted, seeming quite miserable, and Hermione’s heart went out to her. Kell was almost certainly in her Dominant’s black books.

Elinore went out of her way to make Hermione feel welcome, chatting with her about commonplace
things over their teacups. After breakfast, Hermione retired to her room and pulled out her schoolbooks. Her whole life might be in turmoil, but that was no excuse to skive off revising.

She established what was to become her regular schedule for the next several days: breakfast, revision, lunch, revision, dinner, socialising, and alone time in her room, including frequent masturbation and explicit descriptions of same in her green journal. By Wednesday, she was so firmly entrenched in her routine that she was taken aback when Pitty visited her that afternoon, interrupting the translation of a particularly thorny Ancient Rune text, to deliver a note from t.

Hermione,

I know you’ll forgive our absence … and silence. We’ve had quite a bit of catching up to do, but we feel quite up to company today, and we’d like for you to be our first guest. Please come for tea at three o’clock. We’ll be completely informal. Pitty will escort you up. See you then!

~~t

Hermione set the note aside, smirking. Hopefully, one day in the not-too-distant future, she and her Master would be holed up in her room for a few days, catching up. For now, it would be nice to see t again—and to become better acquainted with Master Maximus, Severus Snape’s best mate.

Pitty left her outside a door on the second floor, and another house-elf—Grate, according to the name embroidered on his tea towel—admitted her to the elegant suite of rooms. She passed through a small foyer into a sitting room, where Rafe Lestrange, also known as Master Maximus, lazed upon a sofa with his adoring wife and submissive, t, seated upon a cushion at his feet. He looked significantly better: his colour had improved, his cheeks had filled out some, and he looked well-fed and rested. Taffy looked radiant, her cheeks flushed with colour, her eyes brilliant. Hermione reflected that the one-time ‘shop girl’ looked prettier now than she had ever done when Hermione had been jealous of her. On the coffee table before Taffy was a well supplied tea tray. Rafe gave Hermione an engaging grin and waved her into an armchair across from him.

‘Welcome,’ he said.

Hermione sat, smiling at her hosts. ‘Thank you,’ she said, feeling slightly awkward. She’d been with Harry and Ginny and Ron and Lavender when they were snogging in the common room, but she’d never been in company with two people who had so obviously scarcely risen from their shared bed to receive her. She found herself amused and slightly aroused. How she missed her professor!

‘Are you settling in well at Roissy House?’ Rafe inquired, lacing his fingers through his wife’s abundant, silky hair and exerting slight pressure to bring her cheek to rest upon his knee. Then he began to stroke t’s hair as absently and pleasurefully as one might the pelt of a pet cat.

‘Yes, I am,’ Hermione admitted. ‘One falls into a routine, after a bit.’

Taffy nodded, smiling, submitting to her Master’s caresses with evident enjoyment.

‘Are you getting on with your revision for your NEWTs?’ Rafe inquired.
Hermione glanced at him, surprised. ‘I am, yes,’ she admitted.

Rafe laughed. ‘Yes, he told me you’re a swot,’ he said teasingly, and Hermione felt her face flush. ‘He said he had encouraged you to pay particular attention to Ancient Runes,’ he added, musing.

Hermione sat forward a bit. ‘Yes, he did,’ she said. ‘Do you, sir, happen to know why?’

Rafe’s dark brows knitted, but he gave a sharp shake of his head. ‘I don’t know specifically,’ he said. ‘I am not as deep in His Lordship’s counsels as is your Master.’ His hand briefly cupped Taffy’s cheek, then slid down to stroke her throat. ‘I can’t say that I would want his place, to be honest.’

Hermione nodded at this comment but did not speak. She didn’t know what to say. She could only assume that Severus Snape was a more essential member of Voldemort’s team than was Rafe Lestrange. All things considered, she would probably prefer for her Master to be less involved—but it was not her choice to make.

‘No, I can certainly understand that,’ she said at last.

Rafe smiled again, a genuine lightening of his features. ‘So, Hermione, what do you think, so far, of D/s?’

She grinned. ‘It takes my breath away,’ she said honestly. ‘Well, he takes my breath away, and he knows exactly what I need, usually before I know it, myself.’

Rafe nodded seriously. ‘It’s his job to know,’ he said. ‘Severus takes his Domination quite seriously, you know.’

With no warning, Rafe twined his fingers in the hair at the nape of his wife’s neck, tugging her head back and leaning over to share a deep upside-down kiss with her. When he released her, he said quite audibly, ‘Serve out the tea.’

‘Yes, Master,’ t said, rising to her knees and reaching for the tea service on the coffee table.

Hermione watched as t prepared her husband’s tea and pivoted to pass it to him. Then she turned her blue eyes on Hermione. ‘Milk and sugar?’ she asked cheerfully.

Hermione nodded. ‘Two sugars,’ she said.

When all three of them were sipping tea and nibbling freshly baked ginger newts, Rafe said, ‘Do you have any questions for me?’

Hermione didn’t hesitate. ‘How did you come to be called Master Maximus?’ she asked.

Rafe laughed, a full-bodied sound which echoed around the room. ‘Oh, Severus would like to be here to answer that one for you,’ he assured her. He took another drink of his tea before he answered. ‘It was all Sev’s fault,’ he began.

Taffy darted a sly look at him, and he pinched her chin. ‘You’re an impudent girl,’ he said, his voice caressing, and Hermione knew that t was delighted to the core of her being to be thus addressed.

Rafe looked back up to meet Hermione’s gaze. ‘When Hadrian and Elinore brought Severus and me
back to Roissy House to introduce us to the inhabitants and to begin to teach us about D/s, it seemed to me that everyone had Roman names.’ He grinned. ‘Even Rodolphus and Rabastan had better names than I did. So, when I began training, I chose my own Roman name. It’s how I’m known in the community, but my closest friends still call me Rafe.’

All three of them laughed, then, and Hermione began to feel at ease with them. It was fascinating to see a D/s couple who were obviously in love with one another interact in their own home. Her professor had told her once, ‘Master Maximus and t are a special case,’ and Hermione could clearly see that this was true. Of course, her experience with D/s couples thus far had been restricted to the interactions between Hadrian and Elinore and Master Claudius and his two submissives, but still, she had seldom seen a couple even outside the lifestyle more besotted with one another than Rafe and Taffy Lestrange. Her time with them passed much too quickly, and it was with some regret that she rose to leave them—but it was clear that the tension between them was rising again, and they needed their privacy.

‘Will I see you at dinner?’ Hermione murmured as she gave t a goodbye hug.

Taffy glanced over her shoulder at the smouldering eyes of her husband. ‘I don’t think so,’ she said, sounding slightly breathless, and Hermione could only give her an extra squeeze.

‘Have fun!’ she giggled, and with a final wave to Rafe, she left the room, smiling all the way back to her first floor abode.

Over the next few days, the Lestranges began to make appearances at meals, and when they did, Hermione felt much more included in the table conversation. It was at one such after-dinner gathering in the sitting room that the mystery of t’s easy camaraderie with Reggie Bardulph was explained.

‘Sprout always said you’d make a bad end of it,’ Taffy shot at Reggie hotly, clearly on the losing end of an argument.

Reggie straightened up from his lazy sprawl indignantly. ‘She never did!’ he cried. ‘The old girl had nothing but good to say of me—I think she had a soft spot for me,’ he added smugly.

Hermione looked back and forth between them. ‘Wait—do you mean Professor Sprout? At Hogwarts?’

Reggie turned to her instantly. ‘Yes—she was our Head of House.’ He shot a dark look at Taffy, who was no longer attending to him but curled up in the curve of her husband’s arm. ‘Miss Perfect Prefect over there was a constant thorn in my side.’

Hermione was dumbstruck. Of course, it made perfect sense that anyone in England who had attended school would have gone to Hogwarts. In fact, she could easily see t as a member of Hufflepuff House, loyal and hardworking, although she would have pegged the indolent, sometimes unkind Reg as a Slytherin. But it was difficult for her to imagine these people as students of Professor Snape.

Elinore put her thoughts into words. ‘Oh, yes, Hermione, it’s always amusing when new members of the community meet Severus for the first time. They are universally horrified to discover their old
teacher amongst the practitioners of D/s.’ Elinore laughed merrily, and Hadrian took her hand in his, smirking in amusement.

Kell murmured to Master Claudius and moved to sit beside Hermione on a pouf near the fire, taking care to give Reggie wide berth. ‘Are you excited about the weekend?’ Kell asked her sotto voce.

Hermione glanced up into the other girl’s bright eyes. ‘What’s happening this weekend?’

‘It’s the full gala weekend,’ Kell said excitedly. ‘Friday night is the formal dinner and socialising, which is the best time for the Doms and subs who aren’t already hooked up to meet someone. Saturday night is fetish night, when we all dress up and show off, and there’s plenty of play going on in the dungeons.’

Hermione smiled, feeling a tug of envy at the notion of play in the dungeons. ‘Are you allowed to play?’

Kell shot a glance at Master Claudius, who sat with Vi on a pouf at his knee, her long blond hair cascading over his dark trouser legs as he caressed her. ‘With permission,’ she said. ‘He’s only denied me once, and it was as punishment.’ She bit her lip and sighed. ‘I deserved it.’

Hermione frowned. ‘But how does that work, if you’re collared to him?’

Kell blinked at her. ‘This?’ she said, touching the red patent leather collar. ‘This is only a training collar. He’s my training Dominant, but it’s not the same as being collared by him.’

Hermione digested this information, nodding slowly. So, up until the time her professor had accepted her offer of submission, he had been her training Dominant. If he had brought her here before collaring her, would he have put a training collar on her? It was all rather confusing, she had to admit.

‘So, you’re permitted to play with another Dominant if you’re only wearing a training collar?’ she asked.

Kell gazed into the fire, a dreamy look in her eyes. ‘If your Master commands it, then you can be given to another Dom for play, even if you’re collared to him.’

Hermione froze in horror. Her Master could give her to someone else—Reggie Bardulph, for instance? Or Master Claudius?—and permit that Dominant to use her as he would? She couldn’t keep the look of distaste from her face, but Kell was lost in her own thoughts and didn’t see.

‘But yes,’ Kell continued, ‘if a Dom asks for me, Master Claudius can give permission for me to play.’ She shivered, and a smile touched her lips as she turned shining eyes back to Hermione’s face. ‘One of these times, I’m going to meet the Master who will want me—and I’ll want him—and that changes everything, Hermione.’

The tone of yearning in the other girl’s voice pulled at Hermione’s heart, and she reached out to pat Kell’s arm. ‘Yes, you’ll find your Master,’ she agreed warmly. ‘It does change everything.’

Kell covered Hermione’s hand with her own, her face saddening. ‘I’m a right cow, talking about all this when your Master is away,’ she said. ‘It must be terrible.’ Kell darted a glance again at Master Claudius before leaning closer to Hermione and whispering, ‘Is it true that he broke Master Maximus out of prison?’
Hermione nodded once. ‘And I haven’t seen him since then,’ she said. ‘He’s written, and Master Maximus says he’s fine, but I will be easier in my mind when I can see him with my own eyes.’

‘And feel him with your own body,’ Kell added with a grin, and Hermione could only laugh in agreement.

The next day was Friday, and even at breakfast, Hermione could feel the hum of activity in the house. Everyone, including the house-elves, had things to do to prepare for the incoming guests that night. Taffy stood from her place beside her husband and gave him a long kiss before coming around the table to Hermione. Kell looked up from her teacup avidly. ‘Is it time?’ she asked.

Taffy smiled down at Hermione. ‘Kell and I have a surprise for you,’ she said. ‘We’re going shopping!’

Kell grabbed Hermione’s hand and tugged her up. ‘Your Master wants us to outfit you for a gala weekend,’ she said.

Hermione turned to Taffy. ‘You’ve heard from him?’ she asked, feeling a stab of disappointment that her professor would contact Taffy.

‘No,’ Rafe answered, and Hermione turned to face him. He sat at ease, a cup of coffee and the *Daily Prophet* on the table before him. ‘No, Hermione, he sent his instructions with me—but I’m afraid I haven’t been able to spare t to take you shopping before today.’ His smile was almost impish. ‘You understand,’ he added, dipping his head so that his unruly fringe fell over his eyes.

Hermione watched this performance indignantly and turned back to t. ‘He’s impossible!’ she said, torn between laughter and annoyance.

‘He knows it, believe me,’ Taffy assured her, and leading her into the hallway, she called for Pitty to bring their cloaks.

Out on the street in the brisk January air, Hermione felt her spirits brightening. She hadn’t been outdoors since arriving at Roissy House and hadn’t realised how much she missed the sun, weak though it was. The three girls set off on foot.

‘It’s a bit of a walk from here to Diagon Alley,’ Kell confided, ‘but we can always use the exercise, right?’

Taffy snorted. ‘You just want to be out from under Vi’s thumb for as long as possible,’ she accused.

Kell laughed mischievously. ‘Can you blame me?’ she asked.

Hermione glanced at Kell. ‘Is she unkind to you?’ she asked.

Kell shrugged. ‘Not unkind, no—but she’s not very warm—neither of them are.’
Hermione thought about that as they angled onto Brook Street. She would never have characterised Professor Snape as warm, either—not until the first time he wrapped her up in a blanket and held her until she stopped trembling. Even then, the warmth stopped at the door, until her next session with him. No, it wasn’t until he relented and accepted her offer of submission that she was fully enveloped in his warmth, and now she was like a fly trapped in tree sap. She could not pull herself free to escape, but she felt no desire to do so, either—she was entirely content to become encased in the amber of her professor’s possession.

They passed Claridge’s and turned the corner onto New Bond Street, and Hermione stopped abruptly.

‘What’s wrong?’ Taffy asked, reaching to pull the black fur rimmed hood closer about her face.

‘I don’t have much gold,’ Hermione said. ‘I spent most of what I had on Christmas gifts. I hadn’t planned on needing new clothes.’ She frowned. ‘My parents will put more gold in my Gringott’s account soon, but I don’t have any funds for shopping now.’

Taffy pulled a battered leather purse from her cloak pocket and pressed it into Hermione’s hand. ‘It’s taken care of,’ she said kindly.

Hermione extended the purse to her. ‘I can’t take gold from you,’ she said, mortified.

Understanding touched t’s face, and she linked arms with Hermione, gently tugging her along the street. ‘That’s not my gold, silly,’ she said. ‘Severus sent it for you. He didn’t want you to spend your funds for smart clothes for a gala weekend, but he did want you to be properly attired.’

Hermione felt her face flame. ‘I don’t want to take his gold,’ she whispered, embarrassed.

Kell linked arms on Hermione’s other side. ‘Well, you’re not doing it for yourself, are you?’ she said reasonably. ‘You belong to Master Severus—people who look at you will interpret what they see as a reflection of him—and he wants you to look fabulous.’ Kell grinned down into Hermione’s face, and Hermione felt herself relaxing again. ‘So be a brave girl and accept your fate!’ Kell advised. ‘You’re going to look smashing at the party, and that’s that!’

Upon their return to Roissy House that afternoon, windblown and laden with carrier bags, Rafe Lestrange stalked down the marble hallway and closed his hand imperiously about Taffy’s wrist, marching away without a word or a backward glance. Hermione looked anxiously at Kell.

‘Is t in trouble for something?’ she asked.

Kell grinned and grabbed the carrier bags t had abandoned. ‘I wouldn’t think so,’ she said. ‘Master Maximus is … well known for his appetites.’

Hermione couldn’t help a small chuckle. ‘Do you know what Master Severus is known for?’ she asked curiously.

Kell glanced at her soberly. ‘Intensity,’ she said shortly. ‘No one knows about his appetites because he keeps himself reined in all the time—he never expresses emotion in public—it’s why everyone
was so shocked to know he’d collared you.’

They had reached the staircase, and Hermione started up first, glancing back over her shoulder at Kell. ‘You know an awful lot about Professor Snape for someone who’s never met him,’ she said mildly.

Kell nodded. ‘It’s true,’ she said. ‘But I spend loads of time sitting with Master Claudius, not speaking. I hear his conversations with the other Doms—and even he and Vi talk about it. Face it, sis—you’re the talk of town in D/s world!’

Hermione made a face, but she knew it was true—the D/s community was a small one, and her presence at Roissy House, wearing Severus Snape’s collar, was causing quite a stir.

Hermione put away her things and took a long bubble bath, luxuriating in the scented water. Later, wrapped in her dressing gown, she sat down with her journal to record her meals and her activities. As she opened her journal to the marked page, her heart stopped in her chest, for there, before her eyes, was his handwriting.

little one,

I know that your first weekend gala at Roissy House is a daunting prospect, and would be even had I been there to properly prepare you for it. As it is, many allowances will be made for you, as a young girl present for her first party without her Master in attendance. Stay close to Hadrian or Rafe and their wives, behave with decorum, and hold your head up proudly.

Before you begin to dress for the party, strip bare and assume the submissive’s pose. Spend ten uninterrupted minutes in contemplation of all the lessons I have taught you and feel my presence in your mind and your soul, for I am, indeed, within you.

Know that I am ever watching over you.

Your Master,

SS

Hermione shed her warm dressing gown and fell to her knees upon the rug beside her bed, assuming the submissive’s pose and feeling her professor’s burning black eyes roving over her skin. Her nipples peaked in arousal, and the throbbing began low in her belly, and she remained as she was for far longer than the ten minutes he had requested, feeling his presence singing inside her like her own personal Siren’s call.

Kell knocked on her door at six o’clock, an hour in advance of the official party time, and Hermione rose to let her in. Kell was lovely in a simple blue gown which exactly matched her eyes. It clung to her curves and fell to the tips of her shoes. Her red patent training collar had been replaced with a plain gold one, unadorned save for a small platinum disk with the word ‘Trainee’ engraved there.
‘Let’s do your hair first,’ Kell said, and Hermione obediently sat before the dressing table. ‘Remember to be respectful of the Dominants,’ Kell reminded her, ‘even the ones you already know. Whereas you might chat and carry on with Rafe in private, when you’re in public, you’ll avert your eyes and call him Master Maximus.’

Hermione looked sceptical, but Kell was adamant.

‘Believe me, this was one of my first major mistakes,’ she said urgently. ‘We don’t really have a true idea of how to go on in D/s society—well, I have a little bit of an idea now, but you are clueless—and it is always, always best to err on the side of caution.’

Kell combed the Sleekeazy’s Hair Potion through the bushy mass of Hermione’s hair, her face scrunched with concentration.

‘People will be curious about you. They’ll want to meet you and talk to you. But they shouldn’t ask nosey questions. Remember that you are the keeper of your Master’s reputation in his absence, and everything you do and say—’

‘—reflects on him!’ Hermione snapped. ‘I know, I know!’

Kell glared at her reflection in the mirror. ‘Don’t think I don’t know exactly how you feel,’ she said soberly. ‘I’m only harping on this because I don’t want to see you make the same mistakes I made.’

Hermione closed her eyes and took a deep breath. How would her professor want her to answer?

‘Thank you for caring about me, Kell,’ she said at last. ‘I’m a bit of a swot in school—I tend to learn quickly and retain the knowledge, and I’m not generally an impulsive person.’ She smiled ruefully at Kell in the mirror. ‘I promise, if I get in a tight spot where I don’t know what to do or say, I’ll excuse myself and go find someone safe.’

Kell completed the application of the hair potion and stepped back. ‘There you go, swot—long straight hair.’

Hermione jumped from the bench and whirled, feeling the unfamiliar non-bushy mass swinging about her head. ‘Thanks, brat,’ she said, and the two submissives grinned at one another, their friendship sealed by the adoption of insulting nicknames.

Hermione slipped into a black thong and pulled sheer black stay-ups up her legs before shedding her dressing gown and taking her evening gown from the wardrobe rail. It was black and strapless, a corseted bodice that pushed her breasts into prominence and left her milky skin undorned, save for the black leather collar at her throat. The skirt fell to mid-thigh, and Hermione was a bit worried that if she raised her arms up, the tops of the stockings would show.

‘What about not showing my legs to other Doms?’ she had hissed to Taffy in the shop.

‘Your Master’s instructions are that your apparel should show you off, as he would do if he were here,’ Taffy had answered inexorably.

Now Hermione slipped her feet into the spiky black pumps and studied her reflection in the full-length mirror. Her makeup was minimal, a touch of mascara, colour on her cheeks, and sheer pink upon her lips. Her shoulders and the expanse of her chest above the corset were like porcelain against the black of the dress. Her hair fell thick and brown to her shoulder blades.
'Not bad, for me,' she muttered, twitching at the bodice.

‘You look fab,’ Kell informed her. ‘Come on!’

Rather than the family dining room, Kell led her to a more formal room along the broad marble tiled corridor. They slipped into the room and Hermione was struck by the press of humanity and the brightness of their garb. She had an impression of a great number of people, ranging in age from herself to a gentleman who was older than Hadrian by quite a bit, if one were to judge by his wrinkled face. In between, it seemed to her that most of the people present were of her professor’s age group, with the Dominants appearing to be in their early forties and the submissives in their mid to late thirties. The men were all in Muggle white tie, rather than the dress robes one saw at Hogwarts parties, and the women wore lush Muggle evening gowns.

Kell pulled her forward, and Hadrian Hunter met her with a smile. ‘You girls look lovely,’ he said, genuine admiration in his eyes. ‘Hermione, I would like to introduce you to some people who would very much like to meet you.’

Kell immediately deserted her, sliding into the crowd and seeking out Master Claudius, and Hermione found herself surrounded by a smiling group of curious people. She quickly lost track of their names; four of the wizards she met were on the Board of Directors for Roissy House, and to each of them, Hermione gave a tiny curtsy and deferentially averted her eyes. Three of the directors also introduced her to their submissives, and before long, Hermione was completely at sea. She would never be able to remember all the names!

To her relief, T materialised from the crowd and stopped before her, eyes wide with admiration. ‘Hermione—you look stunning!’ she whispered. ‘He would be so proud!’

Hermione flushed with pleasure, smoothing her hand down the black skirt. ‘Really?’ she said. ‘Well, you picked out the dress, after all.’

Taffy was ethereal in an ice blue satin dress which rose to her throat, ending just below the platinum and aquamarine collar she wore, a perfect match for her wedding ring set. But when t turned to lead Hermione to her place at the dinner table, Hermione saw that her friend’s back was completely bare, almost to the cleft of her buttocks.

‘Heavens,’ she said softly. ‘I see what you mean about your husband liking to show you off.’

Obviously pleased, Taffy turned impulsively and enveloped Hermione in a hug, whispering in her ear, ‘Perhaps one day your husband will be showing you off here, too.’

Hermione pulled away from her. ‘My Master says wives make notoriously poor submissives,’ she said, her cheeks flaming with colour at the very notion of being married to her professor.

Taffy propelled Hermione into her chair at the table and sat down to her right. ‘Famous last words,’ she sniffed dismissively.

Kell slipped into the chair to Hermione’s left. ‘Why are you blushing?’ she whispered as she spread her napkin over her lap.
‘Never mind,’ Hermione answered, willing the colour to recede.

Dinner was quite elaborate, and Hermione found that she could not eat nearly everything that was served. She kept her head down and picked at her food, comforted to be seated between her friends. Had her Master been present, she knew, she would have been far less comfortable. He was training her, opening her up to all that the lifestyle had to offer and to her full potential—had he been present, he would have been placing her in confusing situation after confusing situation, instructing her as they went and waiting to see how she would handle each hurdle.

*I don’t care!* she thought fiercely. *I would rather be confused and embarrassed with him here than miserable without him.*

At last, dinner was completed, and a number of Dominants retired to the Dominants’ Study to smoke cigars. The rest of the party went across the hall to the reception rooms, which had been thrown open into one large room. Hermione was surprised to see that the furniture had been moved to the periphery and that here was a small orchestra on a dais at the end.

‘Wait!’ she said in panic, turning. ‘No one said there would be dancing!’

She was mortified to see that she spoke to no one. Kell was chatting merrily nearby with a small group of wizards and witches in their twenties, and t was nowhere to be seen. Elinore seemed to sense her distress, and the older witch glided to a stop at Hermione’s side.

‘What’s the matter, my dear?’ she asked solicitously.

‘The dancing—no one mentioned dancing,’ Hermione said. ‘I don’t know the protocol—I don’t know what to do!’

Elinore drew her to a chair at the side of the room and motioned for her to sit. ‘Don’t fret,’ she said soothingly. ‘The girls ought to have told you, but never mind. It’s simple enough. A collared submissive may dance with her Master or with any other Dominant whom her Master gives her permission to dance with. In general terms, you may also dance with any Dominant with whom you stand upon family footing—for instance, the Dominants with whom you live. You could dance with Hadrian or Rafe or—’

‘Or me,’ Reg said merrily, cutting across Elinore rather rudely.

Elinore shook her head indulgently. ‘Or with Reggie,’ she agreed. ‘Even if he does leave a bit to be desired in the behaviour category.’ She waved to someone at the door and began to glide away. ‘The Julians are here,’ she said as she left.

Hermione stiffened in her chair, keeping her eyes averted. ‘I would prefer not to dance,’ she said politely.

‘I’m perfectly safe, you know,’ Reg said, frowning at her. ‘Odd that you would accept Snape’s collar and be worried about the likes of me. At least I’m not a …’ He trailed off without finishing his sentence.
Hermione pressed her lips together and refused to look up. She had no desire to dance; if she had her druthers, she’d be upstairs, revising. Perhaps, if she were a true participant in this community, she would be interested in socialising with the other submissives and their Dominants, but truly, all she wanted was her room and her journal and her warm, woolly dressing gown.

‘Look, I’ll show you,’ Reg said, and Hermione looked up to see him walking away from her. ‘I’ll dance with Kell.’

At the sound of her name, Kell turned, and seeing who had spoken, her eyes grew wide, giving her the look of a deer caught in the headlights of a Muggle automobile. What was wrong with her? Hermione knew that Kell wasn’t permitted to be in a room alone with Reg when Master Claudius wasn’t present, but wasn’t that rule relaxed during these social occasions?

Reg spoke to Kell, who looked at her feet, then glanced at Hermione, and at last, she took Reg’s hand and joined him on the dance floor. There were a few couples dancing, and Kell and Reg began to dance with surprising grace, as if they had done so before.

‘Poor girl,’ Elinore said, and Hermione turned to see her hostess had returned. ‘She’s had a rough time of it, but we all have high hopes that she’ll be successfully placed with a Master, this time.’

Hermione studied her friend as she danced with Reggie Bardulph. For all their grace, they were still uncomfortable with one another, Kell staring at Reg’s buttonhole, and Reg staring stonily over Kell’s head.

‘They’re together and apart, all at the same time,’ Hermione murmured.

Elinore made a ‘tsk’ sound. ‘Well, it’s no wonder,’ she said.

The dance ended, and Kell pulled away from Reg and went back to her friends. Reg glared after her for a moment, then he descended upon Hermione again.

‘See?’ he said easily. ‘I’m as safe as a vicar. Dance with me.’

Hermione sighed. ‘If I dance once, will you leave me alone for the rest of the time?’

Reg touched his wand. ‘On my honour as a wizard,’ he vowed.

With a distinct lack of grace, Hermione stood and accompanied Reg to the dance floor. ‘I was hoping to see Jacque and Diana tonight,’ she said, placing a hand on Reg’s shoulder and clasping his hand with the other.

‘Old Bobby doesn’t usually come for dinner and dancing,’ Reg said with a sneer in his tone. ‘He’ll be here to flaunt them in their nakedness tomorrow night, and they always give a dungeon demonstration after lunch on Sunday, but they usually skip Friday night.’

Hermione looked up at him frankly. ‘If you’re so bored by it all, why are you here?’

He scowled. ‘Where else am I going to find a witch who enjoys being tied up for sex?’ he demanded.

Hermione scoffed. ‘If that’s all you want, try an advert in the Sun.’
Reg snorted. ‘Of course it’s not all I want. I want a witch to yield her will to me—to trust me to choose for her.’

Hermione raised an eyebrow.

‘Stop that!’ Reg objected. ‘You look just like him when you do that.’

Hermione glowed with delight. ‘Do I really?’

‘No, you’re not nearly ugly enough, but it’s still quite off-putting,’ Reg grumbled.

The dance ended, and the two walked back to the side of the room. ‘May I speak frankly?’ Hermione said.

Reg glanced at her narrowly. ‘All right,’ he agreed.

‘I think it’s possible that you send mixed signals,’ she said. ‘You don’t draw enough of a distinction between yourself and the submissive.’

Reggie Bardulph glared at her, his lips pressed together in a tight white line of fury.

Hermione stopped and looked up at him. ‘You might consider finding a couple willing to train you,’ she said serenely. ‘Not all Dominants go through formal training, but the best ones do.’ And giving Reg a shining smile, Hermione turned and left him.

The rest of the evening felt like a primer in why she desperately missed her Master. She wandered from group to group, seeking peace and finding only conversation and interaction that made her ache for him.

A lean, dark-skinned Dominant stood with his equally dark-skinned submissive near the orchestra, with a cluster of Dominants around them. The submissive wore a turquoise gown of a stretchy fabric, and her Dominant had lifted her breasts from the bodice of the dress. As he spoke with his friends, he methodically pinched and twisted his submissive’s nipples, his deep-voiced conversation liberally peppered with the moans of his woman.

‘Nyalla has made great progress in anal intercourse, haven’t you, my slut?’ the Dominant said, bending his head to kiss the submissive, and for a long time, they kissed, their mutual passion evident to all. ‘We’ll show everyone tomorrow, won’t we, pet?’ he said, lifting his face from hers.

‘Yes, Master,’ the woman said, her Jamaican accent roughened with her palpable need. ‘Please.’

Hermione turned from them, her quim throbbing from the casual demonstration of their sexuality. She hovered on the edge of a group of submissives, thinking she would be spared the sight of amorous touching by joining their conversation.

‘Oh my God,’ said a fortyish woman with short bronze hair, ‘have you seen the way he’s hung?’ She held her hands apart at an impossible distance, and all the women laughed. Hermione bit her lip and looked away, her memory flooded with mental pictures of her Master, fully erect, the purplish head of his cock exposed and glistening, ready to …
She turned and gave her head a shake. Sweet Merlin, how she needed him! Her nipples tightened against the unforgiving whalebone bodice, and her quim throbbed with the memory of his hands … his tongue … his cock impaling her flesh, driving her wild. Overheated, she exited the reception room at the far end of the hallway, closest to the family sitting room door. She could slip in there, make her way to the staircase, and retire to her room. No one would know she had left early—she wouldn’t be missed—she could bring herself off in the privacy of her room and write about it in her journal, and in that tiny way, she would share this night with her professor.

She heard voices in the hallway behind her, but she continued to creep toward the double doors of the sitting room, focussing on them as if her salvation lay behind them.

‘Hermione!’

That was Taffy’s voice, calling from a fair distance away, and she turned to see t standing halfway down the long, broad hallway, one arm out-flung in the general direction of the foyer. Hermione looked questioningly to Taffy, her lips parted to speak her query, and she was aware of people coming to the doorways, lining the length of the enormous corridor, their attention directed to the foyer, as well.

Hermione had begun to run before her mind had properly identified and interpreted the image of the tall, dark figure emerging from the entrance hall into the corridor. She spared not a thought for whether the tops of her stockings would be revealed as she ran. It was a miracle that she did not twist her ankle or fall off the soles of the high-heeled shoes, and it later occurred to her that perhaps the pumps had been charmed to prevent her from falling. As it was, she fairly flew down the length of the hall, no longer aware of the avid faces of the other guests who lined the passageway, her only focal point the man striding toward her with no attention for anyone but her.

Vaguely, she heard Rafe shout, ‘Good one, Sev!’, but his voice was mere background to the pounding of the blood in her head. As she drew closer to him, she saw that he wore black trousers and a tight black high-necked jumper. She saw the snarl on his lips and recognised it as his signature predatory look—the one that made her cream her knickers—and she knew when he stopped and braced his booted feet upon the marble floor, it was not a halt in his headlong flight to hold her, but preparation to receive her irrepressible flying jump as she hurled herself at him.

In the next instant, she was in his embrace, her arms wrapped about his neck, her legs wrapped about his waist, the scent of his aftershave bathing her senses as he kissed her savagely, his fist wrapped proprietarily in her hair. The dinner guests as well as the musicians had all crowded to the doorways and out into the hall, and the crowd of them burst into spontaneous applause at the unprecedented sight of Severus Snape accepting—welcoming, even—the joyous adoration of his eighteen-year-old collared submissive.

Clinging to her Master like a shipwreck victim to a rock, Hermione was sure she heard Hadrian Hunter’s voice mutter, ‘Well I’ll be damned.’ And in the next moment, wrapped protectively against his lean body, she experienced the squeezing of Side-Along Apparition, and they were alone in their room.
Chapter 46: Reunion

A/N: You continue to stun me with your outpouring of love for this story. I would like to write a tiny word of caution. Many of you have contacted me about interest in the practices portrayed in this story, including the D/s lifestyle. I would like to say that this story, as are all the stories on this archive, is a fantasy. It is my ideal of Dominance and submission, with Severus Snape starring as the (almost) perfect Dominant. Please do not confuse this fantasy with the reality of the D/s lifestyle. And always, always take every precaution to safeguard yourself and your health.

For the Potions Master’s Amusement

Chapter 46: Reunion

They arrived directly before the door, as if they had just stepped through and closed it behind them. Before she could draw breath, he shoved her ungently against the hard wood and kissed her again, a burning urgency in him which turned her very bones to mush. His teeth bit at her as he thrust his tongue into her mouth, his hands everywhere at once. In seconds he had mapped the contours of the boned corset bodice of her black dress, found the zip beneath her arm, and bared her to the waist.

‘Were you enjoying yourself?’ he demanded, his hands upon her breasts, squeezing them rhythmically, his teeth at her throat.

‘No, sir,’ she answered, her fingers buried in his hair, her eyes drinking in the sight of his bent head.

His head came up, and his eyes were staring into her own. ‘Why not?’ he asked.

‘I was missing you too much,’ she admitted, her hands deserting the oily hair to caress his face, fingertips rasping over his five o’clock shadow. ‘Seeing them all together just made me want you more.’

And she welcomed him as he slipped into her mind, bathing himself in her emotions, flipping through her memories since last they had been together. Cradling his face in her hands, her mind caressed his as he satisfied himself as to the veracity of her assertion.

She could not repress the sigh of sadness as he withdrew from her, but scarce had she registered his loss before he manhandled the expensive party dress down her hips, allowing it to fall in a puddle at her feet. He smirked at the thong, magicking it away with a negligent, wandless motion. Then he was bent to her again, a bruising kiss at her throat as long, knowing fingers delved into her quim. He asked no more questions, spoke no more words, intent upon his purpose. A lone finger slipped up her channel, seeking and finding the slickness occasioned by his kisses and caresses. Her gasping reaction as his slick fingers slid over her clitoris brought a growl from him, feral and dangerous. She stared into his face, knowing a sane woman would feel fear or distaste, but the very primal element
of his passion riveted her.

‘You’d like it if I fucked you against the door, wouldn’t you, little slut?’ he said, his low voice slightly breathless, as if he, too, were unbearably aroused.

‘Yes, Master!’ Hermione cried, clutching at him as he plucked her clitoris.

‘You’d like it if the whole house was standing in the hallway, hearing your back hit the door, knowing the rhythmic thumping was my cock ramming into your cunt, wouldn’t you?’

Hermione’s eyes closed, and she dutifully imagined what he described, feeling the combination of pride, arousal, and shame he meant to elicit. Good God, what did it mean that she wanted a houseful of strangers to be privy to her most personal relations with this man—this Dominant wizard—who had become her ideal, the man against whom all other men would henceforward be measured and found wanting in her estimation?

‘Answer me, Hermione,’ he commanded, his voice carrying a hint of warning.

‘Yes!’ she cried. ‘Yes, I’d like that, sir.’

He kissed her then, tenderly, his tongue teasing and caressing hers as he fingered her, drawing her surely towards an easy orgasm. She rode his fingers, sucking his tongue, mindless of all save his mouth devouring hers, his fingertips rubbing her clitoris in that perfect circular motion.

His lips left hers and trailed to her ear, tracing its contours with the tip of his wicked tongue. ‘Perhaps you’d like it even better if they were in the room with us,’ he said hoarsely, grinding his still clothed erection against her hip, ‘if they got to see your pretty little cunt and hear your whimpering cries while I fuck you to a screaming climax.’

Hermione turned her head to one side, unable to pull herself away from the pleasuring fingers but needing to register her protest. ‘No, please,’ she breathed. ‘Please, Master—don’t make me do it!’

And he stepped away from her, distancing his body from hers for the first time since he had borne her flying leap in the hallway. ‘Do you mean to say “no” to me, Hermione?’ he inquired, his tone suddenly casual.

She took a step towards him, pushing the fallen dress aside with her foot, her hands outstretched. ‘I …’ She swallowed. ‘Please, sir—I would be embarrassed.’

One of his eyebrows rose. ‘And does your embarrassment mitigate your obedience?’ he asked.

Hermione took a steadying breath, trying to alleviate her panic. This was him—this was the way he was—and his ways were not going to change. He would always and forever be drawing her onward, opening her more, demanding that she reach and stretch to achieve her maximum potential. Life with Severus Snape would never be comfortable—not for very long. It was in his nature to challenge and taunt and tease until she had followed him to the brink of mental and physical exhaustion, and then he would reward her beyond her imaginings, drawing her body across the same chasms over which he had coaxed her obedience, until she became an empty vessel of light in his arms.

Either she moved forward, knowing what would be expected of her, or she acknowledged to herself that she was not up to the challenge of being this man’s submissive and bowed out now.
Without demur, she dropped to her knees, assuming the submissive’s pose, clad in nothing save her black stay-ups, her eyes trained deferentially upon his boots. ‘No, Master,’ she said softly. ‘My embarrassment is of no consequence at all. I trust you.’

Something in him seemed to break, for in the next instant, he had dragged her up from the floor and propelled her across the room to the bed. ‘On your back, knees raised, and arms above your head to receive your reward, my pet,’ he purred into her hair, releasing her as she scrambled onto the mattress.

She didn’t attempt to reason why; she simply obeyed. When her arms were extended over her head, the invisible silken restraints which were one of her Master’s signature touches secured her wrists in position. He then insinuated himself between her thighs, spreading her quim before him and breathing deeply, as if partaking of perfume.

‘Exquisite,’ he murmured, and then he placed his lips around the swollen bud of her clitoris and slid two fingers inside. The sucking pressure he exerted upon her was perfection; she was stricken instantly to head thrashing incoherence by the intensity of the pleasure he delivered. She wanted it to go on forever—she wanted to come before she next drew breath—she wanted to retaliate in kind and drive him similarly mad with bliss.

She was still vibrating from the power of her climax when he penetrated her again.

‘Look at me, pet,’ he commanded, and at once, he was within her body and her mind.

Hermione did not need to be told to reach for him with her mind and her heart and her soul; she was helpless to do anything else. Her stocking clad legs hooked around his thighs as their nether parts slid exquisitely together, and she felt his need of her with every impact of his hipbones against the softness of her inner thighs.

Oh, fuck, she thought, undulating beneath him, her body racing impossibly to another climax.

Yes, he responded, his voice saturating her thoughts, and for an instant, she saw herself in the Grimmauld Place kitchen, him pinning her to the floor. I am fucking you—fucking you—mine, mine, mine, and with each repetition, his hips twisted, sending her spiralling along the trajectory he blazed, their very beings fused against the explosion of colour in the deep black oneness.

She dozed, clinging to him, floating in a cloud of happiness so complete she had no wish to move.

Later, she felt him move and cracked one eye to see him stand to pull up the trousers still encasing his legs to mid-thigh. When she stirred, he looked down at her, his fingers fastening his belt, and she smiled sleepily, reaching for him with both arms, hoping he would interpret the action as an invitation and a welcome, rather than an instruction of what to do.

Half a smile touched his beautifully formed lips, and he lay down again, coming into her embrace and burying his face between her breasts, hands pulling her tightly against him. For an untold space of time, he suckled her breasts, moving his mouth from one to the other and back, as if afraid one would take offence that the other had received too much attention. As he sucked, her quim began to ache with arousal.
At last, he rolled away from her, and he sat up, reaching into the cloak draped over the bedside chair. ‘On your knees, little one—you never received your New Year’s whipping.’

Hermione was instantly awake and alert. Whipping? What implement did the word ‘whipping’ imply? Assuming a position on her hands and knees, she watched her professor withdraw a small box and enlarge it with a flick of his fingers. He opened it, and Hermione recognised several of the toys with which they had played in his dungeon quarters at Hogwarts—but the one which he withdrew was the black and red leather riding crop, his last gift to her.

‘I know you were disappointed, pet,’ he said, extending the crop, handle first, before her face. ‘Remember how to greet your crop?’

Feeling a bit silly, Hermione pressed her lips to the crop, the scent of the expensive leather sending anticipation skittering along her spine like a promise.

‘Good girl,’ he purred. ‘Turn your arse toward me and crawl backward,’ he instructed.

The first blow upon her bum stung like fire, drawing a sharp cry from her.

‘It is a singular implement, is it not?’ he said caressingly, delivering another fiery blow to her bottom. ‘I am very fond of the crop, as you will be, too, Hermione.’

Hermione gasped aloud as the third snap of the leather thong fell upon her upper thigh. She would be fond of it? Oh, how she doubted that! But had he not proven her wrong time and again?

After ten thwacks of the crop, he tossed it aside and withdrew her hairbrush from the box. ‘I think that’s enough for a first time with the crop,’ he said, ‘but I believe you are in sore need of a good spanking—are you, pet?’

‘Yes, Master,’ Hermione said, suddenly longing for the intimacy of her place across his lap, her hairbrush thudding upon her bottom.

The room in Roissy House would always have different connotations for her, now, she realised as he secured her across his knees on the loveseat before the fire and spanked her. He spanked until her bottom was completely afire—until her cunt throbbed for relief—until her thankful tears had soaked the cushion beneath her face.

Then he gathered her to him, drying her face with his own handkerchief and cradling her to his chest until the sobs no longer wracked her body, and she lay quiescent in his arms.

‘Thank you, Master,’ she whispered, and he looked down at her, his midnight eyes knowing.

‘I will always give you what you need, Hermione,’ he told her. ‘I will give you the discipline you need and the sexual satisfaction you crave. I am your Master.’

He kissed her and caressed her for a long time. Each time she came close to orgasm, he desisted, holding her and rocking her gently, crooning into her ear pet names and filthy words and suggestions of outrageous scenarios, until he began to touch and kiss her again. She was as clay in his hands, an empty pot to be formed and fired at his pleasure.

As the pale dawn sunlight peaked around the edge of the curtains, he put her to one side and stripped naked, then sat upon the loveseat and allowed her to impale herself upon his cock. He kissed her
when she leaned in for his lips, fondled her breasts with the half-lidded sneer of a satyr, and when he drew close to completion, he reached between them to stimulate her pleasure centre, his upward thrusts meeting her downward plunges in a rhythmic dance as old as time.

‘To whom do you belong?’ he demanded, his free hand now gripping her hip mercilessly, forcing her down as he plunged upward.

‘I belong to you, Master,’ she panted, sweating through the potion in her hair, feeling the naturally bushy mass frizzling about her damp cheeks and forehead.

‘Come with me,’ he commanded, and the heel of his palm ground against her clitoris as he came undone beneath her, his eyes closed, his breathing ragged, his seed pulsing into her body. Staring down into his extremity, knowing that no one in the world had ever seen him thus unguarded, Hermione shattered atop him, feeling her womb contract with spasms even as she cried out his name, its syllables echoing around in the still of the room.

Dimly, she worried that he would reprimand her for saying his name, but sated and sweat soaked, he led her to the bed, seeming finally to have found a measure of peace. He twined his limbs with hers, his eyelids falling as he settled in to sleep.

‘Severus,’ Hermione murmured, as if to test the shape of his name upon her lips, and the sound of it remained in her ears as she followed him into sleep.
She awoke at mid-day, alone in the bed. She was instantly bolt upright in the bedclothes, terrified beyond speech by his absence. Had she dreamt it? Somehow, the sticky residue between her legs did not reassure her. Then, the door to the ensuite bathroom opened and steam billowed out, followed by Severus Snape, naked save for the towel with which he vigorously dried his hair. He was too thin, his ribs clearly delineated, his hipbones too prominent, but he was perfection to her eyes, and she flew to him, throwing her arms about his waist.

‘Good morning to you, Hermione,’ he said drolly, tossing aside the damp towel.

‘Good morning, Master,’ she replied happily, rubbing her cheek along the black hairs between his flat nipples.

He took her wrist and led her to the wardrobe, where he pulled open the door and took down a box from a shelf above the rail.

‘I never saw that there,’ Hermione said, puzzled.

‘You weren’t meant to,’ he replied, lifting out a set of silver handcuffs. ‘Give me your hands.’

Hermione eyed the metal Muggle contraption with some misgiving, but presented her hands as requested. Her professor fastened them with care, checking to see they were snug without being too tight, then he stepped back, surveying her with her shackle-bound wrists. His lids fell to half-mast, and Hermione could not help but know he viewed her with pleasure, for his cock stirred in its nest of wiry black hair.

‘Good girl,’ he said, placing a hand at the back of her neck and propelling her forward to receive his kiss.

Unable to hold or caress him, Hermione conveyed what appreciation she could with her receptive lips. His hands found her breasts and he caressed them gently as he sucked her tongue, only releasing her when she was thoroughly aroused, and his own erection jutted between them.

‘Come along,’ he said, slipping past her to the bathroom. ‘Do you need the loo?’

‘Yes,’ she said, wondering how she was to manage with her hands bound.

She entered the bathroom, which contained a toilet, a sink, and a bathtub. Her Master leaned a negligent shoulder against the doorframe and watched her. Hermione stood beside the toilet, feeling the need to urinate but confused by her professor’s continued presence.

‘Relieve yourself,’ he said calmly, ‘and I shall assist you.’
Oh, no. Surely he didn’t mean to wipe her with toilet tissue? She felt her face flushing such a deep crimson that it burned beneath his gaze, and she lowered her eyes.

‘I am waiting, Hermione,’ he said, his observation of her discomfort causing him no apparent concern.

‘I don’t know,’ she began, and her throat was so dry she could not continue. She swallowed and tried again, her voice sounding scratchy and strained. ‘I don’t know if I can, with you watching me.’

He did not reply but crossed to the sink, twisting the cold water tap. The sound of the water rushing down the pipes made her feel as if she would wet herself, so she sat upon the toilet seat and emptied her bladder, her eyes closed, her face still burning with mortification. What if she had been in need of a bowel movement? How would she have managed that, when she could only make herself do it in a public restroom by casting a Silencing Charm, giving her the illusion of being the only person there? How did he always seem to hit upon the situations in which she felt the greatest embarrassment—where she was the weakest?

‘Part your legs for me, Hermione,’ he said, and she knew he was kneeling before her. Turning her face to one side, she obeyed him, wishing she were anywhere but in her body as he deftly and competently dried her nether regions. ‘Move into the bathtub,’ he said.

Hermione stood, her face turned from him, and walked over to step into the tub, hearing the flushing of the toilet behind her. She felt miserable and violated in a way that no liberty he had taken with her body sexually had ever made her feel. She sat down in the cold porcelain tub and stared down at the handcuffs as his hands came into her line of sight. He fitted the plug in the tub and turned the water on, a murmured spell guaranteeing that the water splashing down was the perfect temperature for her. She knew he knelt at her side as the water rushed to fill the tub, but he did not speak, and she did not look at him. She couldn’t. She was far too humiliated to do so.

At last, he turned the water off. She felt his hands in her hair, and it was twisted up and off her neck, magically secured atop her head. She saw him dip a flannel into the water, rubbing it against a bar of soap. Gently, he began to wash her. ‘Are you ready to talk about it?’ he asked her mildly.

Stubbornly, Hermione continued to stare at her bound wrists, trying not to relax into the divine sensation of him washing her bare back.

‘Very well,’ he said. ‘Then I will talk about it.’

He rinsed her back, sluicing the soapy residue from her skin and moved slightly to facilitate washing her front. He began with her throat.

‘I am your Master now,’ he said. ‘You belong to me—you realise this, do you not, Hermione?’

His fingers rested upon her collar, and when she turned her eyes to his, the profundity of emotion she saw in the unbelievably dark depths stopped her breath in her throat. Unable to vocalise, she nodded once; she did, indeed, know that she belonged to him, heart and body and soul.

‘I am responsible for your care and welfare,’ he said, his tone gentle, slipping over her, warming and comforting, insinuating itself even into her closed-off places. ‘I can and will wipe you when you piss and poo; insert your tampons when you bleed and remove and replace them; wash your hair; bathe your body; apply lotion to your skin; brush the tangles from your hair; dress you from head to foot;
feed you with my own hands; spank you when you need discipline; finger you and lick you and fuck you when you need to come; teach you and learn from you; read to you and talk to you and sing to you—I will clamp your nipples and whip your bottom and flog your cunt; plug your arse and fuck it; teach you to swallow my cock and tongue my arse—I can and will do everything it is possible for one person to do to another, Hermione, and you will not only permit it, you will welcome it, because you belong to me.’

He had not looked away from her through this whole recitation; his hand now spanned her throat, and he leaned forward, pressing his lips to the collar she wore. Then he kissed her mouth, and she found herself melting into his touch and thrilling to his kiss as she always did, clinging to the pleasure and putting away the thoughts of her shame, praying that he was right, and that she would someday welcome his invasion of her privacy.

He had her stand, and he kissed the chain at her waist, then he washed her legs. He turned her so that her back was to him, and he washed between her bottom cheeks while she bit her lip and fought not to tense against him. Then the flannel hit the bathwater, and his hands were spreading her bottom open wide. She closed her eyes when his tongue touched her arsehole, mortification and shame blending with the horrible flicker of arousal she felt in her quim. Then he turned her and repeated the process, carefully washing her pudendum, then washing her inner labia. When he was satisfied as to her cleanliness, he spread her wide and lapped at her clitoris with the broad flat of his tongue, his eyes closed, an expression of rapture upon his face. She stood in the bathwater, her feet wide apart to accommodate his desire to see and taste her quim, and watched him, her bound wrists resting atop his head, his drying hair soft beneath her fingers.

With a final kiss to her clitoris, he stood and plucked her playfully from the tub, slinging her over his shoulder and exiting the bathroom. She was laughing when he plumped her down upon the unmade bed, and gasping when he entered her. His engorged cock filled her, sliding through the slickness of her cunt, spreading her wide and caressing all her most needy bits. He looked down at her with an intense expression.

‘You’re my little slut,’ he told her. ‘What do you want from me, little slut?’

Hermione raised her hips to meet him, spreading her thighs wider, wishing she could merge her body with his once and for all. ‘Everything!’ she panted, feeling the pressure building as he coaxed her yet again to the peak of her arousal.

‘Yes, you do,’ he said. ‘Who can give you everything?’ He thrust and snapped his hips, and she felt the shock as if she had seen the tip of his cock impact her sweet spot.

‘You!’ she cried, wishing desperately that she could free her hands from the cuffs—how badly she wanted to rake her fingernails across his back, just now! ‘Oh, God, Master—only you!’

He slowed and lowered himself to kiss her mouth. ‘You want to come, don’t you, pet?’ he whispered.

Hermione wrapped her legs about his hips, grinding herself against him, burning for him. ‘Oh yes, Master, please,’ she whimpered, sliding upon the constant of his cock in her cunt. ‘Please, I’ll be such a good girl.’

He raised his head and began slowly to move again, wringing a cry of approval from Hermione. ‘You need my cock, little one,’ he informed her, proving it with another gasp-inducing snap of his hips.
‘I need your cock,’ she agreed, rocking beneath him, desire ratcheting higher, still without reaching the climax she so desperately required.

‘Who owns your orgasms?’ he asked inexorably, the friction of their slick, interlocking parts nudging her slowly beyond coherence.

‘You do, Master, please!’ she cried, writhing.

‘Then come for me, Hermione,’ he ordered, seemingly satisfied with their interchange. ‘Let me hear you.’

She unwound her legs from his hips, permitting him greater range of movement, and digging her heels into the mattress, she strove below him, a full participant in this carnal act, taking her pleasure from the iron rod of his cock as surely as he took his from the hot slickness of her cunt. In seconds the completion came to her, a violent rush of sensation, slamming into her, knocking her senseless amidst the screaming orgasm burning through her body.

As if from a distance, she saw in his face the frozen, rigid rictus of his own completion, and one fierce shout was all the sound he made as he emptied himself into her. She wound her legs about him again, gently undulating as he softened within her, wishing to milk every ounce from him, to be as full as she could be of his essence. When they were both as sweaty and dirty as they had been before their baths, he sagged onto the pillow beside hers, magicked the handcuffs back into their box, and gathered Hermione against him.

‘My most prized possession,’ he murmured into her hair.
Chapter 48: Before the Dungeon

A/N: Please be aware that Hermione’s introduction to corset-wear is completely from my own imagination. I have never personally worn one, and the reading I have done on the subject indicates that one should slowly accustom oneself to tightening the stays and build up wearing time gradually.

For the Potions Master’s Amusement

Chapter 48: Before the Dungeon

Seated before the fire, they ate a sustaining meal as the winter daylight waned beyond their windows. Hermione found it difficult to tear her gaze from her Master. She watched as he consumed everything on his plate.

‘Is the food good, where you're staying?’ she asked.

He snorted. ‘No,’ he answered shortly.

She smiled tenderly. ‘I’m sorry to hear it,’ she said. ‘Are your quarters comfortable?’

He glanced at her sardonically. ‘We are not quartered at the Ritz, Hermione, but neither are we sleeping out of doors. Don’t probe for information. The less you know, the better.’

She felt the rebuff and turned to look into the fire, the reminder of the difference in their situations goading her to comment. ‘You’re furthering the cause—I’m living in luxury and revising for my NEWTs. I should be with Harry and Ron. I can’t bear to do nothing.’

He grasped her upper arms and dragged her across his lap. ‘No, pet,’ he murmured into her hair, his hands soothing up and down her back. ‘No, I would run mad if you were in danger, and I did not know where you were.’

His usually smooth, silky voice was rough with emotion, but she could not identify what it might be. Was it … affection? Or simply another manifestation of possessiveness? She pressed her cheek to his chest, stroking through his hair, her whole body flushed with heat at the notion that he was expressing feeling for her.

‘You don’t need to worry,’ she assured him, pressing a kiss to the hollow beneath his ear. ‘I would have gone with the boys in a heartbeat had I been with them when they left the Burrow, but I have no idea where they are to join them now.’

He became rigid in her embrace, and she sat straighter in his lap, watching his face.

‘You must learn to adjust your thinking,’ he said sternly, disapproval lacing his tone. ‘You belong to me now, Hermione. You do not make these sorts of decisions without reference to my wishes.’
Hermione frowned. ‘But they are my friends, sir,’ she began.

‘And I am your Master!’ he thundered, his brow darkening. ‘Desist this arguing! I have you safe, and you will remain here, per my wishes.’

Hermione struggled, and he released her, allowing her to stand on the hearthrug before him. ‘Sir,’ she said, ‘please allow me to speak.’

His jaw was set, his lips pressed together in a thin, white line. ‘Speak,’ he commanded.

Hermione took a deep breath. She loved him—loved him!—and she wanted nothing more than to be in harmony with him. But loving him—submitting to him—did not eradicate her past or obliterate the other people in her life.

‘Ever since I was twelve years old, my path has been linked to Harry’s,’ she said. ‘I’ve helped him in every way I could, whether it was solving your logic puzzle so he could reach the Philosopher’s Stone or fighting with him in the Ministry of Magic. My usefulness in his quest to defeat You-Know-Who hasn’t ended just because I discovered I am submissive. Sir, this is a job I have to finish. You wouldn’t have me abandon my friends now, would you?’

She was careful in her tone, to sound reasonable; in her posture, to appear open; in her expression, to look calm. Her heart hammered uncomfortably, and her knees trembled, but with all her might, she strove to hide her fear. If she made her case respectfully, surely he would be receptive.

His fathomless eyes studied her, his face pinched with annoyance. ‘You rate Potter’s claims on your loyalty above my own?’ he inquired dangerously.

Hermione shook her head. ‘I don’t see it that way at all,’ she said earnestly. ‘He is my friend; you are my Master, my lover—you have my heart. Please don’t say that I must choose between my friendships and my submission to you. Must you control every facet of my existence?’

He glared at her. ‘I am responsible for your welfare,’ he said implacably. ‘I must certainly be involved in every facet of your life. Such decisions as where you will go, with whom, and what you will do are not to be made without consulting me.’

‘But you’re not here all the time,’ she said in a small voice.

‘You have your journal,’ he pointed out. ‘If you need my input on a subject, you need only communicate it to me. I will answer you.’ He indicated the place beside him on the love seat. ‘Seat yourself, pet; there’s no need for all this heat.’

Hermione felt her spirits sag. Was she making her point? It felt as if he had taken her reasonable tone and reflected it back to her—almost like a weapon!—and she still hadn’t got him to say she had as much right as he did to contribute to the war effort. She sat again on the love seat, disconsolate, and it seemed to her as if he relaxed, almost imperceptibly.

‘I feel as if I’m not doing anything worthwhile,’ she said, looking down at her hands.

‘Do you consider me to be worthwhile?’ he asked, sounding pensive, and Hermione shot him a suspicious glance. Was he play-acting? Surely he knew how she felt about him!

‘Obviously,’ she said somewhat tartly.
His arm circled her shoulders, scooping her closer to him. ‘You are … important to me,’ he said, holding her against him but staring into the fire. ‘I have no objection to you making contributions to the Light—but let those contributions come from your strengths, rather than your weaknesses.’

Hermione resisted the arm about her shoulders, holding herself stiffly beside him. ‘My weaknesses?’ she said. ‘What do you mean?’ She knew her voice was showing her agitation, but she couldn’t help herself. He was dismissing her, and she wouldn’t stand for it!

‘Well, let’s review, shall we?’ he said, continuing to sate into the fire. ‘You assist Potter with research, such as discovering the identity of Nicolas Flamel and determining the use of Polyjuice Potion.’

Hermione gasped, and he glanced down into her face with a sardonically raised eyebrow. ‘Yes, the Headmaster kept me well informed of your illicit progress through the years.’ Continuing to hold her gaze, he continued, ‘Your cleverness, tireless erudition, and incomparable memory have helped Potter time and again—but are you as helpful to him as a warrior? You are relatively competent in defence, but how well do you actually perform in duelling, Hermione?’

She opened her mouth to deliver a heated retort, but words failed her. What could she say? She had not exactly succeeded in her duel with the Death Eaters at the Ministry of Magic. She had been quickly disabled, waking up only in the hospital wing at Hogwarts, where she had spent rather more time than she cared to remember.

He watched the emotions playing over her face, and when she did not speak, he said, ‘Precisely so.’

Hermione stared down at her hands. It was rather disheartening to be told by the person whose opinion mattered most to her that she was rubbish at something. She was used to thinking of herself as, well, the best at things. She knew she wasn’t as good as Harry at defence, but surely her wand was of some use in a fight?

Firm fingers compelled her chin to rise until she met her Master’s eyes again.

‘We’re a remarkable team, you and I,’ he told her, and she could detect no irony in his tone. ‘I didn’t have the patience for Ancient Runes or Arithmancy in school; I didn’t continue with either class after my OWL year, and I have lived to regret it. You are the top of your year in both subjects, and your professors proclaim you to be the best student they’ve had in recent memory. I, on the other hand, am rather well versed in potion brewing, in Defence Against the Dark Arts, and in duelling. Together, we are a formidable force to be reckoned with.’ The previous signs of his annoyance had dissipated, and Hermione was aware of the warmth in his eyes as they rested on her face. ‘Never believe that your talents are unappreciated,’ he said quietly.

Hermione felt her lips tremble at the sudden onslaught of relief and acceptance. He did value her intellect and her input—he wasn’t discounting her abilities. ‘Thank you,’ she whispered.

The pad of his thumb passed over her lower lip. ‘You’re welcome,’ he said. ‘Now, to business.’ He Summoned his cloak and pulled a book from its pocket. ‘Your instruction in Ancient Runes has been centred around latter day Celtic runes, from Medieval times. I would like for you to familiarise yourself with the Elder Futhark alphabet, which dates back to 150 A.D.’

Hermione accepted the heavy book from him, thrilled by the appearance of antiquity and the unmistakeable smell of aged parchment. ‘Of course I will,’ she said, opening the book cover and
He settled against the cushions, his ebony eyes intent. His hair hung down on either side of his narrow face, and she was compelled to run her fingertips along his jaw line.

‘The spell which brought the Dark Lord back—the one for which he needed Potter’s blood—predates even the information in this book.’ He flicked a long finger and tapped his fingernail against the brown leather binding. ‘It is believed—Dumbledore believes—that a counter-spell exists.’ He took the book from her and set it aside. ‘Your friends are currently searching for that spell. If they find it—and I wish to go on the record as saying I believe that to be highly unlikely—I want you to be prepared to translate it.’

Hermione’s eyes grew wide. ‘If such a thing exists!’ she said, her mind darting ahead to examine the possibilities.

‘If it does, time enough to dwell on it when you have it in hand,’ he said. ‘For now, it is time to dress for the evening.’

She wore the corset Taffy and Kell had bullied her into buying, and when she saw how pleased her Master was with her choice, she resolved to thank her friends at the next opportunity. She came out of the bathroom after magicking it on, not wanting him to witness her unfamiliarity with it. He was sitting in an armchair near the fire, already dressed in his customary black robes over his black suit, and his expression as he rose to meet her robbed her of breath.

She was quickly to find out what being robbed of breath truly felt like.

‘Is this your first time to wear a corset, little one?’ he inquired silkily, circling her in that predatory way that made her wet for him.

‘Yes, sir,’ she answered, moving to survey her image in the long mirror. It was a frivolous garment, pale pink satin overlaid with black lace, holding her rigidly in the confines of its steel bones, the black laces neatly tied in back.

‘Allow me,’ he purred, stepping up behind her and deftly untying the laces.

‘Sir?’ she said uncertainly.

‘It’s a bit loose,’ he explained and began to methodically tighten the lacing. ‘You’ll learn to take slow, shallow breaths, my pet.’

Hermione could only stare at his reflection in the mirror as he expertly tightened the steel-boned garment until she could scarcely draw breath. Before her eyes, her waist became smaller, emphasising the generous curves of her breasts and hips. He tied the laces again and drank in her reflection, his hands now resting on her impossibly small waist, his eyes eloquent with desire.

‘Exquisite,’ he breathed, pressing an open-mouthed kiss to her nape, bared by the up-do of her brown hair.

The corset ended an inch or two above her pubis, and she wore black satin burlesque knickers to
conceal her private parts. The ruffles at the legs gave her some semblance of modesty, and the naughty underpants tied in bows at the bottom edge of the flaring line of the boned corset. Her Master slid his hand inside the satiny knickers, cupping her mons.

‘Another time, we’ll leave these behind,’ he said, his teeth scraping along the arch of her neck as his other hand played with the bow of fabric holding the knickers in place. ‘Your pudendum is far too beautiful to keep covered amongst friends.’

Hermione felt a clutch of fear, compounded by her shortness of breath. He wanted her to go amongst a houseful of strangers with her quim and her bum uncovered? But he’d said ‘another time’—clearly not this time. Thank Merlin for small favours!

He raised his face and looked into her eyes in the mirror. ‘Ah, my pet, when you blush, you match your corset very nicely,’ he observed with a smirk. The fingers in her knickers parted her labia, making her moan and squirm, and his long finger penetrated her, his posture stooping to accommodate the movement. ‘Shall I bring you off before I take you to the Dungeon?’ he wondered aloud. ‘Or shall I bring you to edge of orgasm and then take you downstairs, perfumed with the aroma of your own arousal?’

Hermione could not prevent herself from moving on his fingers, and he slipped out of her channel, spreading the lubrication he had found over her folds, rolling her clitoris beneath his fingertips like an olive in oil. She leaned into him, watching herself in the mirror, doubly aroused to see how she reacted to his touch.

‘Yes, you are very beautiful when I finger fuck you,’ he whispered, his lips at her ear, his black eyes burning. ‘My lovely, lascivious pet.’ Abruptly, he removed his hand from her knickers, straightening up and holding his fingers to her lips. ‘Suck them clean,’ he told her, and she obeyed, her quim aching for the orgasm he had not delivered, wishing it were his cock in her mouth.

At last, pulled his fingers away and turned to the dressing table. ‘Have you any red lipstick?’ he inquired, his eyes travelling over her cosmetics.

Hermione crossed to the table and plucked a tube of lip gloss from the sparse collection. ‘I don’t wear lipstick,’ she said, ‘but I have this.’

He nodded his approval, and she spread the crimson shine over her lips. When she finished, she turned to face him, and he looked slowly from her face down her corseted body, along her smooth, naked legs, all the way to her spike-heeled black pumps.

‘You’ll do very nicely,’ he proclaimed before opening the door and sweeping her along the corridor, away from the stairwell she had always used to reach the lower floor.

‘Where are we going?’ she asked.

He offered his arm, a courtly gesture, and she tucked her hand there, smiling up at him. His answering smile was devilish, unlike any expression she had ever seen before on his austere face—he actually looked mischievous, not unlike his best mate, Rafe.

‘We’re making an entrance,’ he informed her, and as they rounded the corner, she realised they were going to walk down the formal staircase in the entry hall.

‘Chin up,’ he said solemnly as they paused within sight of the balustrade-edged gallery above the
entrance hall, his eyes boring into hers. ‘I am proud to have you on my arm. Show your pride in being there.’

Hermione swallowed, desperately drawing on her reserves of dignity, trying very hard to concentrate on the elegant wizard at her side rather than the fact that she was about to parade amongst a host of strangers in her underwear.

Then he was moving forward, and she was moving with him, her chin raised, onto the landing above the crowd of people milling about the entrance hall. As she and her professor descended the curving staircase, Hermione quickly saw she was lucky to be dressed for the evening, for some of the submissives she saw were naked, save for their collars. Most wore at their waist a diaphanous sheath, much like the one Hermione wore, to holster their wands. She had never seen so many naked and nearly naked women in her life. She tried not to gape.

Then an elaborately corseted woman entered the hallway with three collared men tethered to her by dog leads, each man’s genitals gathered into a gold lamé pouch, providing less modesty than a loincloth. Otherwise, the men were completely naked; they did not even wear shoes.

‘What in the world?’ she murmured, glancing up at her professor.

He smirked. ‘You read in t’s book that there are female Dominants and male submissives,’ he reminded her. ‘I’ll introduce you to Mistress Drusilla. The Femdomme community have their own social events, but Drusilla enjoys the tenor of Roissy House and often brings her submissives to our gatherings.’

‘I see,’ Hermione said, realising that this evening was going to be one learning experience after another.

Many faces were raised to mark Professor Snape’s progress down the staircase with his submissive at his side, and Hermione felt a flush of pride at the admiration she read in the faces, both male and female. Her Master was a person of note amongst these people; they esteemed and respected Severus Snape, who had never before collared a submissive as his own—and she, Hermione, was his choice. The knowledge imbued her with a feeling of triumph so powerful that she felt as if she might burst with it.

The glow of empowerment carried her effortlessly through the introductions which commenced when they reached the marble-tiled floor of the entrance hall. Once again, Hermione was introduced to her professor’s fellow board members, and she was quick to note the state of dress of their submissives. She was surprised to see that neither age nor pregnancy stopped a Dominant from showing off his possession. One submissive was easily the age of Hermione’s mother, her greying blond hair pulled into an elegant chignon above her silver collar, wearing a bridal-white corset which left her breasts bare, her pierced nipples crinkled against the cold. The woman’s wrists were shackled before her, a thin chain running from the shackles, through her nipple rings, and attached to the ring on her collar. The submissive of the next board member was easily eight months pregnant, her belly tautly rounded above her shaved quim. She wore a collar flashing with emeralds, and her Master favoured her with frequent fond looks and tender caresses.

‘Lucky cow,’ a voice murmured behind her, and Hermione turned to see t. Her friend wore long black satin gloves, very high spiked black heels, sheer stockings attached to a frilly black suspender belt … and nothing else. Hermione was not surprised to see that t had a lovely body, but could not conceal her shock at seeing so much of it.
Taffy giggled. ‘You should see your face!’ she teased, pulling Hermione a few steps away as Rafe joined in the conversation the professor was having with the Master of the pregnant woman. ‘I know, it’s a shock the first few times,’ she said consolingly. ‘But you’ll see that it’s so commonplace that, in time, you will scarcely notice it.’

Hermione smoothed a hand down the boning of her bodice. ‘I feel over-dressed,’ she admitted, ‘but terrified of not being dressed.’ Then she asked, ‘Who’s a cow?’

Taffy nodded toward the pregnant submissive. ‘Jane,’ she said.

‘But why?’ Hermione persisted.

Taffy made a moue with her lips. ‘She’s going to have a baby, isn’t she?’ she said.

Hermione blinked. Did t want a baby? How in the world would a baby fit into the D/s lifestyle?

‘Do you want to have a baby?’ Hermione asked her tentatively.

Taffy looked surprised. ‘Don’t you?’ she asked. ‘When you’re older and more settled in life?’

Hermione shrugged. ‘I haven’t thought much about it,’ she admitted. ‘Someday, yes, I’d like to have a baby—but how does that work out?’

Taffy smiled. ‘People do it all the time,’ she said. ‘Most of the couples I know who have children relegate their D/s interactions to the bedroom—or to the playroom, if they have one. But Doms and subs have children together, just like any other couple would.’

Hermione nodded, though she still felt confused by the very notion. ‘Do you think you’ll try for a baby soon?’ she asked Taffy, continuing to dart surreptitious looks to the pregnant Jane.

Taffy giggled. ‘What do you think we’ve been doing for the last week?’ she said.

Hermione laughed as well. ‘Well, then you’re hoping to be pregnant; it makes sense that you think Jane and her Master are lucky.’

Taffy looked blank for a moment. ‘Master Aulus isn’t the father of Jane’s baby,’ she said. ‘Jane’s husband is.’

Now Hermione was shocked. ‘Her husband lets her come here?’ she said.

Taffy shrugged. ‘We try not to judge one another,’ she said. ‘Many submissives only find out about their sexual preferences after they’re already married.’ She sighed. ‘Some of them try to teach their husbands to dominate them—introducing spanking and blindfolds and handcuffs—and others find that they are not satisfied with less than a true Dominant.’ She nodded toward Master Aulus and his Jane. ‘Doms who accept the submission of a woman who is in a vanilla marriage know what they’re getting into up front. They can’t require their women to be sexually faithful to them, and their plans are frequently interrupted because the sub is leading a double life—a vanilla life, about which the whole world knows, and a D/s life, which is her secret.’ She shook her head. ‘Jane’s husband doesn’t know where she goes when she comes here.’

Hermione looked grave. ‘I couldn’t do what she’s doing,’ she said softly. ‘I wouldn’t be able to pretend.’
Taffy gave her a one-armed hug. ‘Be glad you found out about your preferences young,’ she said. ‘You can make sure the man you marry is a Dominant you can trust with all your heart.’

Hermione glanced to where her Master stood, talking with his friends and associates. ‘I trust him with my life,’ she said, knowing that it wasn’t the same thing Taffy had meant. Before this afternoon, she had felt a total confidence in him, but his reaction to her comments about assisting the Order had been distressing. It was true that he had talked her round to his point of view—but did he respect her as a person? Could she trust him not to discount and dismiss her for her youth, or even worse, for her gender?

As she watched him, he turned from his conversation, his eyes seeking her out. He held out a hand to her, and she went immediately to him, incapable of withstanding his irresistible pull upon her.

The strolled along the corridor, her professor nodding and exchanging greetings with others they saw, but he did not stop to converse. They went into one of the receiving rooms, which contained tables of party foods, punch, coffee, and tea, but no alcohol. Hermione declined her professor’s offer of punch and asked him about it.

‘It is considered to be bad form to mix alcoholic beverages with D/s play,’ he said. ‘A Dominant should always be unimpaired when dealing with the safety of his submissive.’

Hermione nodded, then felt a flutter of alarm as her Master backed her up against a wall, an arm braced on either side of her head, blocking her in.

‘I think it’s time to go down to the Dungeon, don’t you?’ he asked, lowering his head and kissing her throat.

Hermione’s eyes darted wildly around the room, where other guests partook of the refreshments at small tables. She saw a Dominant who was lazily tonguing his submissive’s nipples as he conversed with another man, and a couple farther in the shadows who might have been shagging on a tabletop. A bit of public snogging seemed positively tame by comparison, and she relaxed, tilting her head to offer her throat more completely.

‘Yes, Master,’ she agreed, hoping very much that nothing too difficult would be required of her there.

‘Good girl,’ he murmured and captured her lips in a sultry kiss, his single-minded attention to it rendering her, as always, a vessel of liquid desire, his to use as he would. She wound her arms about his neck, her hands twined in his hair, lost to all save his presence. When his hands were upon her, nothing else mattered—how could she have thought she couldn’t trust him?

When he released her, she swayed lightly on her feet, and he smirked at her, remnants of her lip gloss on his face. That meant her lip gloss was smeared and ought to be repaired. He removed his handkerchief and wiped his mouth clean, but he didn’t offer it to her.

‘Should I reapply my lip colour?’ she asked, touching her lower lip.

‘No,’ he answered, cupping her cheek. ‘I like the way it looks now.’

She flushed, knowing she looked like a girl who’d just been kissed hard enough to smear her lipstick. ‘Yes, sir,’ she said and tucked her hand once again in his arm.
He led her into the corridor again and down the hallway to a door she had never noticed before. A burly wizard dressed all in leather stood sentry. He nodded to Professor Snape, then looked inquisitively at Hermione.

‘She’s mine,’ the professor said, and the sentry opened the door down to the Dungeon.
The staircase descended to a room that was, contrary to what Hermione had expected, brightly lit in the central areas, with shadowy niches on the periphery. There were perhaps forty people in the lighted bits of the Dungeon, in various stages of dress and undress, clustered in groups. She could discern shadowy figures in the darkened areas of the room, though she could not clearly see how many there might be.

The centre of the room contained a wooden structure in the shape of a huge letter “X”, with leather cuffs affixed at each of the four ends. A naked submissive was bound hand and foot with her front to the wood, and a Dominant in a leather singlet stood behind her, his skin shiny with sweat. As Hermione watched, the Dominant drew his arm back and let fly with a long-tailed whip, which whistled through the air before striking the back of the submissive, drawing a moan from her. A knot of observers stood well back from the whip-wielding Dominant and his submissive, watching with attentive, appreciative awe.

Hermione was instantly riveted by the sight, wondering how the Dominant could make the whip whistle so as it sliced through the air, and how he could whip his submissive without slicing her skin. She did not realise that her professor had brought her to stand amongst the spectators until he spoke to her.

‘You like this,’ he observed, his hand light upon the nape of her neck.

Hermione was aroused; there was no denying the ache she felt. ‘Yes, Master,’ she replied, watching as the submissive received another blow to her back, a red mark on her skin the only evidence of the leather which delivered the pleasureful pain.

‘This is a St Andrew’s Cross,’ he informed her. ‘You can be bound as Ofelia is, or you can be bound with your back to the cross.’ His breath ghosted over her ear, and she knew he had bent his head to hers. ‘I could tease you for hours, playing with your nipples and your cunt without letting you come.’ The tip of his tongue traced the shell of her ear, and Hermione’s eyes closed, the warmth in her quim increasing.

‘Yes,’ she moaned softly.

‘You’ve missed our time together while I’ve been away,’ her Master suggested.

Hermione slanted a sideways glance to find her professor watching her with half-lidded eyes. ‘So much,’ she admitted.

The hint of smile touched his cruel lips. ‘I should reward you for being a good girl whilst I was away,’ he told her, one hand cupping her bum and giving it a squeeze. He nodded to the couple
using the cross. ‘Master Domitius would be happy to whip you.’

Hermione jerked around to face him, alarm ringing through her. ‘Please don’t give me to him, Master,’ she begged, grasping his robes.

He looked down at her, one eyebrow cocked. ‘Give you to him?’ he repeated.

A murmur rose from the crowd, indicating that Ofelia and Master Domitius had done something remarkable, but Hermione scarcely noticed. ‘Kell told me that a Master can give his submissive to another Master to u-use,’ she said, stumbling over the last word. ‘P-please don’t.’

His eyes were endless, a black so profound that his pupils were scarcely distinguishable. ‘I would, perhaps, request another Dominant to use his particular skill upon you, pet, but I would not permit another man to put his hands upon you.’ His nostrils flared with a sharp intake of breath, as if at an unpleasant thought. ‘Asking Master Domitius to whip you on the cross is one thing; allowing another Master to touch you sexually is something altogether different.’

Hermione swallowed, feeling somewhat reassured, but still not completely at ease. ‘I’m a little bit afraid of the whip,’ she whispered. ‘Must I do it tonight?’

‘I am not of a mind to share you, tonight,’ he replied with a careless caress to her cheek. ‘Come, we will see who else is in a … _demonstrative_ mood, tonight.’

Hermione tucked her hand again in her Master’s arm, and they moved toward the next brightly lit space, passing through a shadowy seating area filled with wide armchairs and a sofa. A man dressed from head to foot in crimson satin with black leather accents sat regally in an armchair, while a naked submissive knelt between his knees. Her arms were bound behind her with an elaborate red leather device which held her hands, wrists, and elbows together as in a tightly-laced single glove. Leather straps went over the woman’s shoulders and under her arms to hold the arm-binder in place. The woman’s head moved up and down in a sure rhythm as she serviced the rigid penis of her companion.

‘Evening, Severus,’ the man said, reaching forward to grasp the honey-coloured hair of his submissive, thrusting into her mouth with an extra flourish.

‘Quin,’ Professor Snape replied with a nod, but he did not pause, and Hermione was thankful that she had not been obliged to curtsy to a man receiving fellatio.

In the next area, Nyalla, the Jamaican submissive Hermione had seen the night before, knelt upon a black leather padded device, which had been adjusted to bring her oiled bottom to the perfect height. Behind her stood her lean, mahogany-skinned Dominant, slowly and deliberately fucking her bum. His skin appeared oiled, as well, and his turgid penis glistened under the bright lights as he withdrew and entered her again. Nyalla’s wrists were bound to the table-like surface where her upper body rested, and her neck was arched, her eyes closed, her face bearing an expression of ecstasy bordering on transcendence as her Master penetrated her over and again. Periodically, the Dominant paused in his activity to bend over, whispering inaudible things to Nyalla, and he would pull at her nipples or reach beneath her to rub her clitoris. These activities brought keening cries of pleasure from the bound submissive, and Hermione’s quim throbbed in sympathy.

‘You see?’ her professor murmured, standing behind her and holding her against him, his hands at her waist. ‘She is aroused beyond reason to have her Master in her arse—she wants to hold nothing back from him.’
Hermione pressed closer to her Master, feeling the hardness of his erection. In answer, one of his hands slid up to caress the soft flesh of her breast above the corset edge, and the other cupped her warm quim outside her black satin knickers, which were becoming damp. She pressed against his hand, still watching the relentless movement of the couple before her, hearing their sounds of arousal. She knew that other observers stood around her; she realised that some of them were touching and being touched, too.

‘You want to come, don’t you, pet?’ her Master murmured, releasing her mons and instead insinuating his fingers inside her knickers, finding and exploiting her slick spot.

‘I do,’ she gasped, dimly acknowledging her Master was fingering her in public and too aroused to care. His reassuring presence and the irresistible pressure of his fingers in her quim allowed her to simply feel, and the ongoing anal intercourse under the lights held her sight, more exciting that she had imagined it could be.

‘What do you want?’ he murmured into her ear, his teeth lightly nipping her ear, drawing a startled gasp from her.

‘I want to come,’ she breathed, broadening her stance to give him more access to her quim.

‘Slutty girl,’ he purred, and then he took her wrist and led her to the next darkened area, and seating himself in a large leather armchair, he pulled her down into his lap and kissed her.

Hermione could not slump in the corset; it forced her to sit up very straight. She could, however spread her thighs wide, and this she did, sucking madly at her Master’s tongue as he teased her clitoris. His free arm came around her, that hand busy at her hip, and suddenly, he had perfect access to her. A light draught of air brought to her the realisation that he had untied the satin knickers on one side, virtually baring her carefully shaved quim to the sight of anyone who cared to approach them. Her fingers scrabbled for the bit of fabric as she tried to cover herself, but her professor imprisoned her hand, his wicked laugh rumbling in her hair.

‘Anyone who wants to watch me finger fuck you is welcome to do so,’ he told her. ‘It’s a beautiful sight, pet. I promise you.’ He plucked at her clitoris. ‘I am very proud of what a lovely, lascivious little one you are.’

Hermione’s hips jerked as he knowingly, in tiny movements, pulled at the nub of her clitoris, sending shocks of pleasure through her. She knew she ought to be ashamed—anyone who passed by would be able to see her nakedness and the way her Master played with her—but she was driven by her passion, nearly mindless under his hand, lulled by his voice, which she would doubtless follow over the edge of reason if he wished it.

She leaned back against him as much as the corset would permit, revelling in his hands on her body, his scent, and the mounting tide of excitement he wrought in her. He bent his head forward, the tip of his tongue tracing the edge of her collar.

‘Make me happy, pet—come for me now.’

His mouth closed over her throat as he bit and sucked sharply, marking her skin, and at the same moment he released her hand and moved to apply pressure just above her pubic bone, as the relentless fingers in her cunt circled her clitoris faster than ever. With the onslaught of divine sensation, she shattered, humping convulsively against his hand until she shuddered limply to a stop.
‘Good girl,’ he praised, shifting her so that her cheek rested on his shoulder. He held her with one arm about the boned corset, his free hand rubbing up and down her bare legs. ‘Are you chilled?’ he asked.

‘No,’ she said, clinging, hating the way the boning of the corset dug into her, preventing her from bonelessly collapsing on top of her Master.

‘We are going to have company,’ he said, and Hermione hastened to sit up, thankful that he did not prevent it when she grasped the ends of her black satin knickers and secured them at her hip.

He put her on her feet and rose to stand behind her as a group of young people approached. Hermione smiled to see Kell amongst them, and the two girls embraced as if it had been a month since they had last met, rather than a day. Kell wore a flashy green suspender belt with a matching thong and a frivolous little headdress with a green feather in her hair. She was slender and long of leg, with small, pert breasts.

‘Sir,’ Hermione said, looking up at her professor, ‘this is my friend, Kell.’ Looking back to Kell, she said proudly, ‘Kell, this is my Master, Severus Snape.’

Kell averted her eyes and gave a slight curtsy, and Professor Snape nodded. ‘You’re Claudius’ trainee?’ he inquired.

‘Yes, sir,’ Kell responded with a quick grin. She turned to her companions, two Dominants who were strangers to Hermione. ‘We came over because someone asked to meet you, sir.’

The taller of the two young men, a blond on the portly side, stepped forward and extended his hand. ‘How do you do, sir?’ he said affably. ‘I’m Simon Curtis, from the D/s community in Sussex.’

Professor Snape shook Simon’s hand, speaking a word of greeting, and Simon introduced his companion, a ginger-haired wizard called Jason Burdon.

‘What brings you gentleman in from Sussex?’ Professor Snape asked, and Hermione knew from his tone of voice that something had displeased him.

‘We’re really here for the Japanese rope bondage workshop tomorrow,’ Simon said enthusiastically, ‘but we thought we’d come by tonight to pay our respects.’

‘Roissy House is always happy to welcome lifestylers from other areas,’ the professor said smoothly, but Hermione could detect a hint of steely edge to his tone. ‘Perhaps, as visitors, you are unaware that Dominants who do not care to play may partake of beverages in the Dominants’ Study, upstairs. We do not drink at play parties.’

Jason straightened and looked a bit embarrassed, but Simon was oblivious to the warning in the professor’s tone.

‘Oh, we’ve had nothing but punch since we arrived,’ the younger wizard assured him a bit too loudly. ‘Of course, before we came from the hotel, we had cocktails before dinner—and a bit of wine with our meal.’

The professor’s nostrils flared in annoyance, and Hermione could sense that he wished to berate Simon Curtis as if he were a firstie who had melted his cauldron. Instead, he said icily, ‘Do not
hesitate to ask if we can be of service to you,’ and with a curt nod, he took Hermione’s arm and steered her toward the next brightly lit area of the Dungeon.

‘Drunk,’ he muttered darkly. ‘Both of them. Not precisely a shining example of the D/s community in Sussex.’

Hermione nodded her understanding, thinking that her professor was as strict in his observance of the proper etiquette in Dominance and submission as he was in the school rules at Hogwarts—which was almost amusing, when you considered that he was on the run from the Ministry of Magic for assisting in a prison break. She smiled to herself, amused, only startled out of her thoughts when he spoke to her.

‘I believe this was made for you, little one,’ he said, and Hermione looked around to see that they stood in an area much like a dining hall. There was a long table, surrounded by a few high stools and even more low wooden loungers, not unlike Muggle patio furniture minus the cushions. The long table was covered by candles of every size and colour, and a small brazier sat in the centre for quick lighting.

A tiny Asian woman was lying upon one of the loungers, and her Dominant stood over her with a burning candle in each hand, decorating her flesh. As Hermione watched, hot wax fell from each candle, simultaneously landing upon the submissive’s erect nipples, drawing a screeching cry from her. Hermione was horrified by the noise—honestly, had the woman no control?

‘Don’t mind Yoko,’ her professor said, sounding amused. ‘Jiro pushes her limits with the wax play, but I’ve never seen a submissive who can endure rope bondage as she can.’

Hermione turned to him, and he stood with his hip resting upon the edge of the table, a pale pink candle in his hand. ‘What’s that for?’ she asked, her voice breaking nervously into a high register.

‘Sit,’ he ordered her, and Hermione climbed onto one of the high stools, hooking the heels of her shoes on a convenient rung.

Her professor stood back and looked at her, his eyes travelling over her in a leisurely manner, as if he very much enjoyed what he saw. Hermione felt her cheeks flush with pleasure at his obvious admiration. Here they were, together in the midst of numerous naked and nearly naked submissive women—definitely Severus Snape’s preferred type—and he seemed to have eyes for no one but her, in her pale pink corset and ruffled black satin knickers. She smiled at him, and by the crinkling at the corners of his eyes, she knew he smiled back.

‘You must sit very still, pet,’ he said, thrusting the pink candle wick into the brazier fire. ‘Your shoulders and chest are unadorned, but I think I can remedy that situation.’

Hermione swallowed and bit the inside of her cheek, but she didn’t speak. They had engaged in wax play before, and she had enjoyed it. He was requiring her to play at this party, but he wasn’t asking her to do something she had never done before. She had absolute trust in his ability to drizzle the candle wax on her skin without harming her.

‘Yes, Master,’ she said, and she focussed her attention on him, knowing if she remained focussed, he would not be disappointed in her.

‘The trick,’ he said, moving to stand behind her, ‘is not to spoil the undeniably expensive corset with candle wax.’
‘Look!’ a voice called from off to Hermione’s right. ‘Severus is waxing his sub!’

‘Still as a statue, little one,’ he murmured, and Hermione realised that he had planned this. He knew very well that his actions with his first ever collared submissive at their first ever public appearance would be closely watched. He wanted it to be seen that in spite of her short time as a submissive, she was not without some accomplishments—and almost certainly, he wished to draw the attention of the people amongst whom he had lived his life for the last twenty years. He was proud of her—had he not said so? This was his method of showing her off without pushing her beyond her comfort zone for her first D/s outing.

A small group gathered around them, but Hermione scarcely noticed the spectators; she was looking through them, her senses heightened to take note of only her professor.

‘We’ll begin now, pet,’ he said, and the first bead of liquid fire touched her flesh, just shy of burning her, a flash of exquisite heat which she felt as if he had licked her quim. The wax was on her shoulder, drizzling down her shoulder blade, with the process repeated on the other side.

Hermione remained perfectly still, feeling each drip of wax as an intimate caress, and she was proud beyond bearing to receive this attention from this man in the face of these witnesses. She had wished once to have her bruises admired, and she knew that she was now in the company of the only people in the world who could view the marks with which her professor gifted her with the approbation they deserved.

Again and again the process was repeated, wax upon wax, her professor creating an artistic piece of her upper back. At last he said, ‘The front now, pet. You’re doing very well.’

Hermione was glad for the warning, for the next drop of wax touched upon her collar bone. She stared into the group of watchers, seeing all of her house-mates, except for Kell. Master Claudius and Violet stood beside Hadrian and Elinore with Reggie Bardulph standing behind Elinore’s chair. Nyalla, looking satiated, stood arm and arm with her Master, and even the crowd who had been watching Jiro and Yoki had turned to watch Severus Snape wax his submissive.

A second wave of wax drizzled down her breastbone, into hollow between her breasts, and Hermione breathed through her mouth as the heat touched the tender skin there. Vi smiled at her, nodding encouragingly, and Hermione smiled in response; it was the friendliest gesture the other witch had ever made to her. She approved of how Hermione endured the wax play. It dawned on Hermione that this small public demonstration affirmed her position not only as Severus Snape’s fuck-toy, but as a true submissive, able to participate in some of the more advanced play practices amongst the community members. Feeling pleased with herself, she silently thanked her Master for preparing her for this demonstration.

At last, her Master murmured, ‘All done now, pet. Remain motionless now while the wax completely dries and allow those who wish to inspect my work to look you over.’

Two submissives Hermione didn’t know were the first to approach, and they had the ginger-haired Jason from Sussex with them.

‘How do you manage to stay so still?’ one of the girls asked. She had big brown eyes and seemed genuinely awed. ‘I’m afraid of wax play!’

Hermione smiled. ‘It doesn’t really hurt,’ she explained. ‘It’s very hot, of course, but it cools very
quickly."

The other submissive walked all the way around Hermione and announced, ‘It looks like a really elaborate necklace, only made of pink wax—and it’s an exact match for your corset!’

‘Master Severus has terrific control of the waxing process,’ Jason said judiciously.

‘Perhaps I have a future career ahead of me in submissive’s couture,’ Professor Snape said in a lazy drawl.

Jason looked abashed, but a familiar voice laughed loudly.

‘I wouldn’t bank on it, Sev,’ Rafe’s voice advised. Taffy’s large husband circled Hermione with an experienced eye. ‘She’s been in training for only four months?’ he said musingly. ‘Not many young subbies could have sat still enough for that.’ He grinned at Hermione. ‘Master Maximus is impressed, Hermione.’

As always, Rafe’s good humour was contagious. ‘Thank you, Master Maximus,’ she said, feeling terribly pleased with herself.

Rafe turned to the others. ‘Who are you lot?’ he inquired with a frown.

Professor Snape stepped into Hermione's field of vision for the first time since the waxing had begun. He extended his hand to her, and she rose from the stool. ‘Lovely,’ he said, his voice pitched for her ears only. Then he said to Rafe, ‘This young man is one of our visitors from Sussex,’ he said. ‘But where is Mr Curtis?’

Jason looked over his shoulder. ‘He and Kell were going to try out the bull whip,’ he said. ‘Let’s go watch them,’ he added to the two girls.

Professor Snape’s eyebrows drew together. ‘Claudius, you gave permission for your trainee to play with the visiting Dominant?’ he asked.

Master Claudius looked up from his conversation with Hadrian and Reggie. ‘Yes, with young Master Simon,’ he agreed.

The professor moved closer to the group of Hermione’s house-mates. ‘That whelp has been drinking,’ he said.

Hadrian frowned. ‘I met with them before they were allowed access to the Dungeon,’ he said quietly. ‘I saw nothing amiss. They had a letter of introduction from Master Thorn, in Sussex.’

Hermione was surprised when Professor Snape nodded and deferred to Hadrian. She was used to seeing him persist until he carried his point. Instead, he went down on one knee before Elinore to engage her in quiet conversation.

‘We’re enjoying Hermione’s company very much,’ Elinore said after a moment, now speaking loudly enough for Hermione to hear. Elinore patted Hermione’s hand.

‘I am in your debt,’ Professor Snape said, and taking Elinore’s hand, he kissed it.

Hermione tried very hard not to care, but she found herself feeling a bit jealous of Elinore. She knew,
from the photograph she had seen, that her Master had certainly had a very close—and most likely an 
intimate—relationship with Elinore and Hadrian Hunter. Even so, knowing it and seeing it were two 
very different things.

Elinore patted Professor Snape on the cheek, and he rose, taking Hermione’s arm.

‘Let’s finish our tour, shall we?’ he said, pulling her along.

Hermione was glad to walk away from Elinore, and they moved through a darkened area. There was 
a sofa, currently occupied, facing a few empty armchairs. Sounds of arousal came from the couple on 
the sofa, and Hermione glanced quickly towards them. In the murk she could make out a naked 
woman standing on the sofa cushions, and between her legs sat a man, fully dressed, whose hands 
gripped the woman’s arse cheeks. The wet noises indicated that the lucky submissive was having her 
quim eaten out by her Dominant, and Hermione was surprised to note that she was aroused again at 
the sight and sound of strangers engaging in cunnilingus.

‘Filthy girl,’ her professor breathed in her hair.

Hermione tried to move away, into the light, but her Master held her immobile, forcing her to face 
the couple on the sofa.

‘You wish it was you,’ he told her, pulling her back against him. ‘You want to have me lick your 
wet cunt in here, with all these people watching us.’

‘No,’ Hermione protested, though the aching heat between her legs suggested that she was lying. 

The submissive on the sofa began to chant, her voice rising in volume until Hermione was clearly 
able to hear her.

‘Eat me eat me eat me eat me, oh Master, eat me, oh, oh, oh, I’m going to come,’ and she dragged 
out the sound of the last word right up until the moment she began to make inarticulate noises, 
grinding herself against her Master’s face shamelessly.

‘Is your cunt on fire, little one?’ Professor Snape asked.

‘Yes,’ Hermione admitted, throbbing with want.

‘Do you want me to touch you?’

‘Yes, please,’ she said, turning in his arms.

He took her hand and closed it around the iron hardness of his cock. ‘Do you want me to fuck you?’ 
he growled, thrusting through the grip of her hand.

‘Please,’ she whimpered.

He removed her hand from him and turned her away. ‘Perhaps I’ll let you come when I fuck you 
tonight,’ he said in a conversational tone, propelling her towards the next lighted area. ‘I’m going to 
take you back to our room tonight, and I’m going to fuck you very hard. When I’m finished with 
you, you’re going to have a difficult time walking.’

Hermione allowed herself to be pushed into the light, hoping they could see the rest of the dungeon
quickly and then go upstairs. Even if he didn’t let her come, surely it would be a relief to have his cock inside her, rubbing away the ache caused by watching that unknown submissive coming all over her Master’s face. Hermione closed her eyes for a moment, hearing again the stranger’s orgasmic cries, feeling her slick arousal on her upper thighs, wondering if everyone in the room could smell her quim as distinctly as she could.

Then the strange medical-looking area impinged on her consciousness, and she stared around her, trying to make sense of what she was seeing. There were three examination tables which looked like they were directly out of a Muggle doctor’s office, and there were witches lying on their sides on the tables with tubing in their bums, and there were metal poles with red rubber bags hanging from them … oh, surely not!

She turned her open-mouthed amazement to her professor, and he smirked at her. ‘No, you’re not imagining it.’

‘But … those people are receiving enemas,’ she muttered, hoping no one would hear her. ‘Surely the magical community has a better …’

The professor snorted. ‘There are potions available,’ he said, ‘but there are some people who prefer the, er, distinctive feel of the Muggle method.’

Hermione was horrified. ‘Please tell me we aren’t going to …’

‘No,’ he said decisively. ‘I have no sexual interest in enemas or other so-called medical procedures.’

Hermione turned away, blinking her eyes as if hoping to clear her mind of what she had seen. ‘I don’t even remember reading about this in t’s book,’ she said.

Her professor chuckled. ‘No, t is an exemplary submissive in many, many ways, but this sort of thing is a hard limit of hers. Rafe uses it as the ultimate threat to enforce good behaviour.’

They had now seen all of the demonstration areas and were making the complete circuit of the Dungeon. They had been downstairs for little more than an hour, yet Hermione felt far more comfortable now than she had done when they first stepped into the room. Ahead, she could see the St Andrew’s Cross, and there was Kell, wearing that silly feather in her hair, bound head and foot to the wooden structure. Standing at the back of the watching group was Reg, his arms crossed over his chest, a frown on his face.

Hermione wanted to watch Kell, and they stopped near Reg, who glanced to Professor Snape quickly before returning his gaze to the couple at the cross.

‘Did you say this bloke had been drinking?’ he asked tersely.

‘Yes,’ the professor responded promptly. ‘Hadrian thought not, but I smelled it on him—and he admitted it to me.’ He nodded his head towards Simon and Kell. ‘How’re they doing?’

Reg snorted. ‘I don’t think he knows how to handle the whip, to be frank.’

Kell glanced over her shoulder and spoke to Simon, who had turned his back to her. Hermione moved forward, through some of the other onlookers, curious as to what Kell was trying to communicate to the visiting Dominant. She saw Simon pull a small flask from his pocket, take a swig from it, and replace it in his pocket.
‘… ready to stop,’ Kell was saying.

‘We’re just getting started, Kell,’ Simon responded, taking up the whip and flicking his wrist to unfurl it.

Hermione moved closer to Kell, wanting to hear her response.

‘I’ve changed my mind,’ Kell said, beginning to sound a bit alarmed.

‘You can’t change your mind with me, girlie,’ Simon said, stepping close to Kell and giving her bare arse a slap. ‘You’ll enjoy it—you’ll enjoy it all,’ he added, shifting the bulge in his trousers to one side.

Hermione moved without thinking, and she was standing directly under the bright lights. ‘She said she wants to be let down,’ Hermione informed Simon baldly.

Simon turned to glare at Hermione, sweat running down his rather florid face. He shifted the whip handled to his left hand and pulled his wand with his right.

A hand closed over Hermione’s shoulder, and with one smooth motion, Professor Snape had moved Hermione behind him. ‘Get back,’ he hissed at her. To Simon, he said, ‘Release the trainee, Curtis,’ he said.

Reg stepped up beside the professor, looking more like a Dominant than Hermione had ever seen him manage. ‘Release her now,’ he said, his voice carrying across the room, which had gone strangely quiet.

With a jab of his wand in Reg’s direction, Simon cried, ‘Expelliarmus!’

Reg’s wand flew into the air, and in a flash, Hermione drew her wand from its sheathe and stepped up to stand by her Master. He reacted so quickly that Hermione never saw it coming. He simultaneously thrust his wand at her and pushed her behind him. The impetus of the shove lifted her a bit off her feet, but the thrust of the wand had been accompanied by a non-verbal spell. She fell heavily to the floor, as stiff a board, landing painfully on her side.

From her ignominious position on the floor, she saw her Master Stun Simon Curtis and shoot ropes from his wand to bind the drunken visiting Dominant. Reg darted past them to the cross, where he gently released Kell, who clung to him and cried.

Hadrian, Claudius, and Rafe moved forward, and after a whispered consultation with Professor Snape, they levitated the bound Simon and went up the steps with him floating before them like a rolled, lumpy carpet.

Hermione watched it all happening through eyes which could not even blink from the defensive spell cast on her by her Master. She was glad that Kell was unharmed, but the mixture of fury and mortification which burned through her body was like acid in her bloodstream, burning through all feelings, save impotent rage.

And with his business attended to, Severus Snape turned to Hermione, lifted her and slung her over his shoulder like a rag doll, and Disapparated with her to their room.
Chapter 50: Cognitive Dissonance

A/N: At the suggestion of some readers, I have created a community specifically for discussing this story and the issues and concepts within. You are very welcome to join us at:

Community dot livejournal dot com slash ftpma_dishing

For the Potions Master’s Amusement

Chapter 50: Cognitive Dissonance

They arrived back in their room, and he unceremoniously dumped Hermione on the love seat, her head near the upper corner, her stiff torso angling across the cushions, her legs jutting over the edge toward the floor. He stood immobile, his face in shadow—yet she could see how intense were his ebony eyes. Then he was gone from her sight, and she heard him in the ensuite bathroom, the toilet flushing, the water running. How long would he leave her this way? How dared he to Petrify her?

She could not calculate how long he left her alone, but it seemed like a very long time. She could not see the mantel clock from her position; her only choice was to stare at the bit of room within her line of sight and fume. At last, he stood before her again. His hairline was wet, as if he had washed his face, and he had removed his robes and his coat, leaving him clad in his pristine white lawn shirt and tailored black trousers. He stared down at her for a long time, his expression unreadable. Then he drew his wand.

‘I am going to release you,’ he said dispassionately. ‘We will then discuss what happened in the Dungeon.’

His unspoken *Finite Incantatem* washed over her, and Hermione immediately pushed herself to her feet, her fists clenched at her sides. ‘If I had my wand, I’d hex your bollocks off!’ she raged.

He raised an eyebrow before producing her wand and extending it to her, handle first. ‘Be my guest,’ he said dryly, ‘if you think you can do it.’

She snatched her weapon and squared her shoulders, assuming a wide battle stance. Anger thrummed through her like electricity in a power line; she knew she was out of control, but she was incapable of reining herself in. Still, she did not cast, and after a moment, he started toward her.

Hermione raised her wand and cast a quick Shield Charm, which her professor batted away as if it were an annoying gnat. Hermione gasped her outrage, but he stopped less than a foot from her. He took her wrist and raised her wand hand until the tip of her wand rested over his heart.

‘Why bother with my bollocks when you can do the thing properly?’ he inquired reasonably. He
released her arm, and his empty hands hung at his sides, his wand sheathed.

Hermione stared at his chest, with her wand-tip pressed against his shirt, seeing clearly in her mind the flesh beneath the fabric, remembering the echo of the beating of his unfaltering heart. She raised her face to look at him, and he watched her with calm interest. In an instant, her indignation died, and she lowered her wand, covering her face with one shaking hand.

‘Why …?’ she began and abruptly sat down on the love seat, her knees of a sudden trembling with reaction.

He did not move from his position. ‘Why do you think?’ he asked.

She began to rock very slightly, forward, then back. ‘Was it because I raised my wand to a Dominant?’ She was trying very hard to think, but her brain was not functioning very well.

‘No,’ he answered. ‘I will never object to you stepping up to assist a sister submissive in need.’

Her hand dropped to her lap, and Hermione looked hopefully at her professor—but there was no hint of invitation in his face, no indication that hurling herself into his safe, comforting arms would be welcomed now.

‘The type of play in which we indulge in this community is dangerous in unskilled or impaired hands. I have never spoken to you in depth about the use of the single-tailed whip, but you knew instinctively that it was unsafe for Kell.’ He paused for a moment. ‘There will always be exceptions to rules, Hermione—this is why training is a necessary for a submissive. In many situations, drawing your wand on a Dominant would be improper. However, doing so in defence of a submissive, when her play partner was impaired and disregarding the submissive’s verbal requests, was completely within your purview.’

Hermione took a deep breath, feeling the slight steadying of her nerves. ‘Was it because I stepped up when Reg was disarmed?’ she asked.

He lowered himself onto the edge of an armchair, his knees swivelled in her direction. He leaned forward, resting his elbows on his thighs, and made eye contact with her. ‘Not specifically, no.’

Hermione gave her head a slight shake, impatient now with her delayed reaction to the earlier excitement. She needed to be able to think. He was wholly engaged in their conversation, inviting her to work out why he had Petrified her. She wanted to be a full participant in the discussion.

‘You put me behind you,’ she murmured, looking at her hands and replaying the scene in her mind. ‘Then Reg was disarmed, and—’

‘No,’ he cut across her. ‘Something else happened when I put myself between you and Curtis’ wand.’

She looked at him. ‘You said, “Get back.”’ she whispered.

He nodded and waited.

‘You told me to do something, and I didn’t do it.’

He granted her another terse nod, and again, he waited.
Hermione sighed noisily, slumping back against the sofa cushions, as best she could in a boned corset. She felt the dried candle wax breaking and flaking off, but she didn’t care. ‘You were in a fighting situation,’ she said, speaking now to the ceiling of the room. ‘An unfriendly wizard was facing you with his wand drawn. But because you gave me an order, I was supposed to just obey you, even though your life was in danger.’

‘We were not in a dark alley facing a band of armed ruffians,’ he informed her levelly. ‘We were in Roissy House with one drunken lout. Did you truly imagine I was in need of your fighting skills?’

Hermione struggled upright again, stung by the slight hint of derision in his tone. ‘I know how to fight!’ she screeched.

He settled back in his chair, crossing one elegant leg over the other. ‘Clearly,’ he said wryly. ‘Don’t mock me!’ she shouted.

‘Don’t,’ he spat, and Hermione found herself brought up short by the warning in his voice. ‘Do not,’ he continued in a more controlled tone, ‘take this license I am permitting you too far, Hermione.’

She pressed her lips together defiantly and averted her eyes. She had felt so sure at the time that her actions were correct, and he had admitted that many of them were—why did everything with him boil down to stupid, bloody obedience?

‘Let us review,’ her professor said, his tone once again even. ‘You saw Kell in danger, and you stepped up to speak for her. This was a perfectly reasonable action. The Dominant wielded his wand, and you drew yours. This was an appropriate response.’

He stopped speaking, and Hermione glared at the hearthrug, knowing where the ‘review’ was headed and unwilling to go along agreeably. She hadn’t meant to be disobedient! She had only meant to step up with the man she loved to face with him the threat he faced. How could that possibly put her in the wrong? She looked up to speak these words, and as soon as her eyes met his, he continued to speak, as if there had been no period of quiet.

‘Your Master took you by the shoulder, put you behind him, and told you to stay back,’ he said. ‘You responded by placing yourself in the line of fire. It was then necessary for your Master to take the time to forcibly protect you, giving his opponent the perfect opportunity to cast an offensive spell unopposed.’

‘It wasn’t like that!’ she objected hotly. ‘It wasn’t about disobedience; it was about loyalty. I will always stand with you! Always!’

She could see the whitening around his lips and the narrowing of his eyes, and she braced for the firestorm of his anger. Then she visibly saw him control the emotion, and he stood, crossing to her and pulling her to her feet, as well. Her drew her stiff, reluctant body against his, enveloping her in his embrace, his face bent to her ear. ‘I am struck to silence by such a declaration,’ he whispered into her hair. ‘No one has ever betrayed such devotion to me.’

Hermione turned her face to his, smoothing black hair away so she could see his eyes. ‘I love you,’ she said simply, her secret pouring out of her in a rush of pure feeling. ‘I can’t help myself.’

The kiss he pressed to her lips then was the sweetest she had ever received, tasting of reverence and
wonder. Her reservations fell away in the onslaught of tenderness, and she twined herself about him like a climbing vine. He kissed her as if it were an act of worship, rather than carnality, and she was utterly undone. His fingers removed the pins holding her chignon, and when each of them had fallen to the floor, he twined his fingers in her straightened hair, cradling her skull as his tongue slowly caressed hers. When he released her lips, she was like clay in his hands, ready to be shaped and fired. He turned her gently and loosened the corset, lifting it off and discarding it on the love seat. It was the work of mere seconds to untie the frilly knickers, and they joined the discarded corset. He smiled down at her with unspoken emotion, a touch of something approaching shyness in his eyes. Had her confession of love brought about this turn-around in his mood? She couldn’t be sure, but she followed him with all eagerness when he took her hand and led her to the bedside. He paused only to take down his box from the top shelf of the cupboard.

‘Will you yield yourself to me, Hermione?’ he asked, setting the box on the bedside table and taking her hands in his, looking into her eyes. ‘Will you allow me to make you a vessel of pleasure, mine to fill and use as I will?’

‘Yes, please,’ she answered, her naked body swaying toward him, the arousal stirred by his worshipful kiss beginning to tingle along her nerve endings in response to his words.

‘Thank you,’ he said sincerely, and from the box he withdrew her black blindfold. She did not need to be told but closed her eyes and waited for the whisper of silk against her eyelids. ‘Let me take away your senses and fill your consciousness with only me,’ he said, and then his lips brushed hers as he secured the blindfold.

He turned from her. ‘Now for your ball gag,’ he said, and she felt the press of the ball against her lips. She opened her mouth to receive it and felt him fasten it about her head.

‘Move to the middle of the bed,’ he said, assisting her to sit on its edge. ‘Raise your arms above your head, so that I can tie you down.’

Hermione scrambled into position, dimly wondering how she had gone so quickly from disgrace to veneration, but much too enthralled to consider too closely. The silken ties looped about her wrists, and her quim throbbed. She would always and forever associate silken scarves with sexual pleasure. She heard her Master moving about the bed, and she imagined him stripping out of his clothing, revealing his toned torso first, then dropping his trousers. Vividly she remembered the feel of his straining erection in her grasp in the Dungeon, and she could not suppress a light moan in her throat.

‘That’s right,’ he said, lowering himself to the mattress near her feet and taking one foot in his warm hands. ‘I am going to make your body sing, pet. Without the gag, the whole house would hear you.’

His lips pressed firmly to the arch of her naked foot, and the gag, as predicted, stifled her gasp. His broad tongue travelled up the inner curve to her great toe, and he licked it before closing his lips around it, sucking. He had sucked her toes before, and she had enjoyed it, but it surprised her how the blindfold intensified her reaction. With no visual stimuli to distract her, her whole attention was on what Severus Snape was doing to her naked body. He leisurely subjected each digit to the sucking treatment, his teeth nibbling the soft pads of her toes. By the time he released the tenth toe, he had so made himself the Master of her nervous system that he could stroke the sensitive soles of her feet without triggering ticklishness.

‘It makes you wet for me when I lick your feet,’ he said, sliding up her smooth legs, his hands parting her thighs as he moved. ‘I can smell your quim, little one—you want to come already, and I
have only just begun to pleasure you.’

Hermione groaned into the gag, lifting her knees and spreading her thighs wide for him, undulating her hips, wanting any attention he was willing to give. Licking, fingering, fucking, she had no preference, as long as he administered his inimitable skills to her aching clit.

‘Divine,’ he growled, his bare shoulders pressed to the backs of her thighs as he licked the seam of her slit, dancing lightly over flesh which screamed for direct, protracted attention.

He spread her labia with his long fingers and tongued her opening, lapping her secretions, the tip of his tongue flicking lazily at the very bottom of her clitoris. Hermione raised her hips beneath his mouth, encouraging him to give her clitoris his full attention, but he only chuckled, deliberately avoiding the full-on pressure she was longing to feel.

He turned his face, his lips closing over the soft skin of her inner thigh, and he applied suction, pulling the flesh between his uneven teeth. Lightly, he bit down, increasing the suction, and Hermione knew her inner thigh would bear the beauty of his love bite for a week. Counselling herself to patience, she abided beneath his ministrations, letting the sensations bathe her senses, drifting into sub-space and feeling very much at home.

‘You belong to me, pet,’ he said, his hooked nose stroking up the crease where her thigh met her mons. ‘What’s more important is you want to belong to me, don’t you? Tell me.’

She could not resist the command of those silken tones, and she managed a sound of dreamy assent behind the ball gag.

She felt his teeth lightly nip at her tummy, just below her navel, and she was glad for his migration north, towards her head, for she could feel the weight and stiffness of his turgid cock on her leg as he moved up. Eventually, his cock would be at the entrance to her quim, and he would be inside her body, driving her to bliss, completing the union of their bodies, minds and souls.

He paused and lingered at her breasts, and she wrapped her legs about his torso, undulating her hips against his nude stomach, revelling in the contact of her flesh with his.

‘Your candle wax is breaking off,’ he told her, flicking a bit of it onto the bed sheets, ‘but it was quite lovely with your corset.’ He closed both hands over her breasts, kneading them. ‘You behaved perfectly while I waxed you, pet—I was very pleased.’

Hermione purred beneath his hands and his words, proud to have pleased him with her conduct. Then a niggling worry intruded on her happy place. What about later, when she had disobeyed his direct order? True, she had distracted him with her profession of love, but was he going to allow her to go unpunished? Surely this behaviour was more of a reward than a punishment.

He slid further up her body, and then he was murmuring into her ear. ‘I promised to fuck you until you couldn’t walk, did I not?’

Her nod of agreement was transmuted to a moan as he thrust into her body. His pace was slow, almost leisurely, and it seemed as if his hands and lips were everywhere. He kissed her armpit, drawing a small scream from her and repeated the process on the other side, invading her most ticklish spot, completely open and vulnerable to him with her wrists bound above her head. His low laugh was at once playful and devilish, and an image of Rafe’s face flittered across her mind—her Master and his best mate were more alike than she had realised. There was so much more of him to
know and love; she had only begun to discover the depth and infinite variety of the man whose collar she wore.

She rolled her hips beneath him, feeling the impact of his hipbones on her pelvis, and reached for him with her mind, wondering if she could join her spirit to his without the aid of Legilimency. Under the blindfold, behind the gag, her world was narrowed to sound and sensation. The sound was the unmistakable slap of flesh on flesh, the inarticulate gasps and groans of sex; the sensation was divine, carrying her beyond herself to the heights of sub-space. Reaching for him was an exercise of opening herself even more completely, feeling with every fibre of her being for him, for his unmistakable presence.

Her first attempt carried her simply to the next notch of excitement, his unremitting movement in and out of her body further refining the quality of her arousal. Every nerve ending tingled, awaiting the dénouement, but she attempted again, concentrating on the symphony he wrought within her and seeking to converge with his own internal composition.

With that mental picture, she felt the connection, like two bubbles floating into contact, each a prism unto itself—and then they joined, separate entities, still, yet with a section of combined energy, where they were one.

And she was in his mind, loving him, accepting him, and his reaction was to become completely still. Their bodies were connected, his erection pulsing within the warm sheathe of her channel, but in his mind, he was entirely taken aback and bewildered.

*How* he asked, too disconcerted to finish his thought.

*I opened myself to you,* she explained, caressing his psyche.

*But I didn’t open myself!* he protested, his emotions a mixture of alarm and longing.

*You did,* she assured him, gently grinding her hips and contracting her vaginal muscles. *You do.*

A pulse of magic passed between them, and she knew he had magicked the blindfold from her face moments before the candle light flooded the space between them, leaving him half in shadow.

The look on his face was fierce, and Hermione knew a moment of feral joy, meeting the snap of his hips with a thrust of her own, setting her on the edge of orgasm.

‘You’re mine,’ he said, his voice rough with exertion. *I don’t understand how you do this,* he said in her mind.

*Only yours,* she agreed, staring into his eyes. *I don’t understand it, but I know it’s sacred.*

*No!* he retorted, but even as he did, his climax was upon him, and she heard the litany in his mind as he came inside her body. *Hermione, Hermione, Hermione!*

And at the sound of her name, spoken in his voice in her mind with such dumbfounded reverence, her completion found her, shivering up her spine and down her extremities with the force of culmination.

*Severus!*
He did not languish beside her, but removed the ball gag, setting it aside. He moved to sit against the
headboard, a spoken command releasing her wrists. Hermione rolled toward him, resting her cheek
upon his slightly sweaty ribcage, stroking his torso with one hand. When he spoke, he sounded
distant—removed.

‘How do you do it?’

Hermione sat up, turning to face him, trying to think of how to explain it. ‘I reach for you with my
mind and my feelings,’ she said.

His chin jerked up, as if he were shaking something off.

‘I’m sorry that I can’t explain it in technical terms,’ she said, touching his arm, ‘but it’s a feeling,
more than anything else.’

He stood. ‘Tomorrow, you will be punished for your disobedience,’ he informed her.

Hermione swallowed and crossed her arms over her nakedness, unconsciously drawing her knees
up, as if she were curling into a ball. She did not speak.

‘Because your infraction was public, your punishment will be public, as well.’

Now her lips parted, and she drew breath to protest, but his next words silenced her.

‘By defying me in public, you showed disrespect, as well as disobedience,’ he went on inexorably.
‘Tomorrow, after lunch, there will be demonstrations taking place in the Dungeon. One of those will
be my punishment of you.’

Hermione was completely bewildered, having moved from his displeasure to his reverence to his
worship of her body to his confusion in her mind to this—a punishment she had, to be honest,
thought she had averted with her confession of love.

In public? The words he had spoken earlier finally sunk in. Oh dear God, what was he going to do?

Tears welled up in her eyes, and she angrily dashed them away, still connected with him enough to
hear the dissonance of his emotions and his actions.

‘What will you do?’ she asked, straining to keep her voice strong.

‘You’ll receive a whipping with the leather strap,’ he said, removing the item from the wardrobe and
laying it upon the bed, where she could see it.

Tentatively, Hermione reached out and picked it up, noting the heft of the handle and the width and
weight of the doubled over leather strap. It was at least twice as wide as his belt and offered a much
less awkward action than a folded over belt.

‘I won’t hide from you that it will hurt more than the belt,’ he told her gravely.

Hermione pushed the strap away from her, and he replaced it in the wardrobe.
'You’ll be naked, save for your collar,’ he continued, his tone flat and merciless. ‘You may wear robes or a dressing gown when walking through the house, but when I whip you, you’ll be naked.’

Hermione turned her face away from him, too upset to speak to him. How could he call her sweet names and do such intimate things to her body in one moment and push her away in the next, explaining how he would display her to and humiliate her before a roomful of strangers?

‘Try to get some sleep,’ he advised her, pulling on his trousers. ‘I have some things to discuss with Rafe and Hadrian.’ He buttoned up his shirt and secured the cuffs. ‘When I come back, I want to fuck you again.’ He bent over to pull on his boots. ‘I’ll be leaving tomorrow or the next day, and I want to have you as many times as I can before I go.’

Without another word, he let himself out of the room, and Hermione hugged her pillow to her naked chest, her recent, earth-shattering orgasm still echoing through her nervous system, at complete odds with her overwhelming misery.
Chapter 51: Dominance, Discipline, and Desire

For the Potions Master’s Amusement

Chapter 51: Dominance, Discipline, and Desire

She was sleeping, an uneasy state filled with distressing dreams, when he woke her. He was naked, his breath smelling faintly of brandy, and the length he pressed to her bottom was a silken rod. He gathered her against him, his lips cool against her sleep-warm shoulder, his hands stroking her flesh. Fresh tears filled her eyes as he touched her, and she turned in his arms, clinging and trembling. Without speaking, he kissed her face, lips ghosting over her eyelids, her cheeks, her chin, the salt of her tears evaporating on his tongue.

He wooed her with dark, silent seduction, coaxing her responses and capitalising on them with a skill so sure that she was lured from the uncertain shelter of prickly resentment to the blissful heights of arousal. The stages of capitulation were so gradual that she was there before she divined her surrender, a collection of nerve endings, whimpers, and at the last, convulsing muscles.

They both slept then, wrapped in one another’s arms, as the winter dawn crept over Grosvenor Square, shining on windows resolutely shaded against the coming day.

At mid-morning, when Hermione returned to the bedroom from the bathroom, her Master’s coal black eyes were open.

‘Come here,’ he said, and she went to him, longing for reassurance, even though he was the cause of her emotional turmoil. His difficult rules—his insistence upon treating her as his submissive and subordinate in every aspect of their lives—had created this rift between them. As she climbed beneath the covers, it occurred to her that the perceived rift existed only in her mind. He suffered no such divide. Her offence of the night before had been discussed, explained, judgment had been pronounced, punishment had been decided upon and would be meted out at the directed time. He accepted all of these things with unruffled calm, his treatment of her indicative only of his desire and dominance, with no apparent consciousness of the discipline to come.

She nestled against him, her awareness of the shortness of their time together drawing her to him when her instincts told her to push away. Tonight, or tomorrow, he would be gone, and she would be bereft and longing for him. He held her, seemingly contented by her proximity. She felt his hand in her hair, then he rolled her slightly, his mouth seeking hers. Their tongues touched and tangled, a lazy, tantalising game. Very soon she was wet and aching, just as if she had not experienced frequent orgasms over the last thirty-six hours. It seemed that he could have her whenever he wanted her, and her body would respond to him, overruling her mind and carrying her outside herself in pursuit of the narcotising bliss he offered. He laid a trail of blazing, open-mouthed kisses down her throat, continuing down to her breasts, and there he settled in. He cupped, lifted, and squeezed, never leaving her nipples unattended, either by his teasing lips and tongue or his pinching, rolling fingers. Hermione yielded herself to the pleasure.
At long last, the fingers trailed down her torso to her smooth pudendum, and he fingered her slickness as he sucked at her breasts. The combined stimulation never failed to drive her quickly to climax, and very soon she was gasping, ‘Master, I need to come …’

‘Then do so, my pet,’ he said before closing his lips more determinedly over the nipple wet with his saliva and lightly applying his teeth, sending her careening over the edge. While she still trembled from the aftershocks of her orgasm, he lifted her bent knee to his hip and moved forward, pushing into her with a groan of pure animal lust. Now his movements were no longer leisurely; he fucked her with single-minded purpose, his eyes raking over her body, from her passion-blurred eyes to her bouncing breasts to the heat scorched spot where their bodies joined.

‘Hands up,’ he snapped suddenly, and from her rather awkward position, she complied, unsurprised by now to have her wrists encircled and bound. ‘You’re at my mercy,’ he informed her, his long, wicked fingers seeking out and finding her pleasure centre. He stared with burning intensity into her eyes. ‘I could leave you here, like this, naked and bound, and go into the hallway to call other people to come watch me fuck you.’

Hermione’s head jerked, as if in denial, but the combination of his fingers and his words was a deadly one. Aroused by the thought and ashamed of the arousal—he knew precisely what to say to her to draw this reaction.

‘Or I can keep you bound and make you come until you pass out,’ he said, drawing her awareness back to him, to the plucking of his fingers at her clitoris, the rotation of his hips, moving his cock in her channel in a slightly different way, extracting a keening cry from her. ‘Would you like that, little slut?’

Mutely, Hermione shook her head once, but his words had served his purpose, and he read it in her face.

‘You may come again, pet,’ he told her, and Hermione bucked against his cock, rubbing shamelessly against his fingers until she cried out her completion. He grasped her hip and drove into her with more force, until on the third thrust, he spilled into her again.

He held himself on one elbow, looking down at her with an unreadable expression as he recovered his breath. Hermione raised a languid hand to smooth his oily, sweaty hair back from his face, then she smiled. He did not return her smile, but he leaned over and pressed a chaste kiss to her lips.

‘Do you need the loo?’ he asked her.

She shook her head, and he released her wrists, rubbing them gently. Then he climbed out of the bed and went into the bathroom. Hermione lay against her pillows, her mind floating in a happy place, her body humming with satisfaction. She was dozing when he woke her.

‘Have your bath now.’

She looked up to see him naked and clean, his wet black hair combed straight back from his forehead. The implacable expression was back in his eyes, but she didn’t care: in her very soul, she trusted him. Silently, she took his hand and allowed him to lead her to the bath, which was full of warm water, awaiting her. She immersed herself to her chin, and he allowed her to soak for a time. She heard his voice in the bedroom, then he was with her again.

‘Sit up,’ he instructed, and with his own hands, he bathed and shampooed her. He did not speak to
her as he did so, but she had his full, undivided attention, and she soaked it up like a sponge. When he had dried her, he wrapped her hair in a towel and led her to the loveseat. A breakfast tray sat upon the low table, but her stomach didn’t care for the sight.

‘Sir,’ she said, ‘I’m not hungry.’

He gave her a sharp look but did not dispute her assertion. ‘You can drink a cup of tea, then,’ he said.

Hermione subsided on the loveseat beside him, and he presented her with a cup prepared precisely as she liked it. He then began to demolish a large breakfast of bacon, eggs, toast, and coffee. She found that she could relax before the roaring fire, comfortable in her bath-warmed skin beside her equally bare Master. The tea soothed her, and she watched the economical movements of her professor as he ate, thinking only of what a pleasure it was to have him with her, determined to exist in the moment.

When he swallowed the last of his coffee, he turned to her. ‘You will eat a bowl of porridge,’ he said, taking it up from the tray. ‘It will not upset your stomach.’

Oddly enough, she found that she was rather hungry, so she reached for the bowl, but he did not relinquish it, indicating instead that she was to open her mouth. So they sat together before the fire, and he fed her until the bowl was empty.

‘Good girl,’ he murmured, and with a flick of his fingers, the breakfast tray was gone. ‘Sit on the floor, between my knees,’ he told her, and as she slid onto the rug, he removed the towel from her hair. ‘Accio Hermione’s hairbrush,’ he said and began to sort out her hair. With infinite skill and patience, he brushed, untangling, smoothing, and at the end, drying as he went. In little more than a quarter hour, he had dried her hair, and it bloomed untamed about her head and shoulders, a bushy brown mane. ‘There,’ he said with finality, and he stood, carrying her brush back to the dressing table. ‘You can sit on the sofa again,’ he told her.

Hermione climbed again to the loveseat, watching her professor dress himself with much less enjoyment than usual. At any other time, having the leisure to study his lean form as he transformed himself into the dour Potions master would have been a delight, but now, she could only attempt to fend off the encroaching memories of the reasons why he was dressing, and she was not.

When he was fully dressed, down to his black suit coat and ever-present robes, he looked at her and with a gesture of his head, indicated she was to come to him. She stood on trembling legs and walked to stand before him.

‘You may wear this,’ he said, and from the wardrobe, he drew a glossy ankle-length pink cape, trimmed in black lace.

Hermione’s jaw dropped. The garment was a near exact match for her corset. ‘Where did it come from?’ she wondered aloud.

Her professor’s answer was a quirked eyebrow. ‘I am not without Transfiguration skills,’ he said sardonically.

Any other time, donning the black silk-lined cape would have gratified her, but the reason for her wearing it robbed her of any enjoyment.

‘Will I wear shoes?’ she asked, wincing at the brittle sound of her voice.
‘There will be no need,’ he said evenly, and he walked to the door. Hermione followed him morosely, the dread she had evaded all day beginning to seep through her body like poison in the bloodstream. At the door he turned to her, and he withdrew clanking metal from a pocket. The tip of his wand touched the engraved silver disk on the front of her collar, and then there was a scrape of metal against metal.

‘What—’ she began, then she saw that a linked metal chain was hanging from her collar, and he held a black leather loop in his hand. He had put her on a dog lead.

‘Come,’ he said and with gentle tug at her collar, he led her into the corridor.

There were far fewer people in the entrance hall than there had been the two previous nights. Hermione knew from information Taffy and Kell had given her that there was a large breakfast on the sideboard in the dining room, and the guests served themselves. In the Dungeon, scheduled demonstrations took place, and some prearranged play between Dominants and submissives would go on until around five o’clock, when most of the participants would pack up and return to their homes to resume their normal, day-to-day lives.

I am a proud witch, she said to herself as she walked down the curving formal staircase beside her Master. I can do this. I can do anything I have to do.

‘Good morning, Severus!’ one of the other Roissy House board members called as they reached the hallway and began the long trek to the Dungeon door. Hermione held her breath, hoping she would not have to stand about while her Master chit-chatted with friends, when all the time humiliation awaited her downstairs.

But the professor simply inclined his head to the other Dominant, maintaining his steady, unhurried pace. Hermione noted that the people she saw today were dressed in less flashy garments then they had worn the night before, as if last night had been for show, but today was for the serious business of D/s play. As they passed one of the receiving rooms, Rafe and t came to the doorway, as if to acknowledge Hermione’s walk of shame. Rafe inclined his head, saying, ‘Sev,’ in greeting, and t gave Hermione a tender, understanding smile. Then they passed the dining room, and Master Claudius and Hadrian stood in the doorway, with a chastened Kell between them. Kell’s lips formed the word ‘Luck’ as Hermione passed her, and then they were at the Dungeon door, and the keeper opened it to allow them to pass down into the darkness.

As had happened the night before, the first thing Hermione saw was the St Andrew’s Cross standing in a pool of light, and though there was no one bound to the cross, there was a group of chattering people standing between it and the foot of the stairs.

‘Master Severus!’

Hermione heard the familiar voices before she made out the figures of Diana and Jacqueline. They stood on either side of a short, bald, middle-aged wizard. He was as ugly and squat as they were beautiful and statuesque—and every bit as naked. Hermione turned her eyes away from the nude Dominant and concentrated instead on Jacquie and Diana. The other girls wore matching gold collars.
with leads attached, and the leads were held in the hand of the wizard between them. The girls held out their hands, as if to clasp those of Professor Snape, but he spared scarcely a glance for them.

‘Could you clear the way for me, Master Robert?’ he inquired in a no-nonsense tone, and the older wizard called his submissives to order with a word and a stern glance. The auburn-haired goddesses fell back respectfully, and Hermione was led into the over-bright light, only to be halted before the wooden structure.

‘Look at me,’ Professor Snape said, and Hermione looked up into his face, unable to hide the mounting panic she felt. ‘You can do this,’ he told her, his voice between a command and a caress. ‘Do you know what you need to do?’

Hermione swallowed and shook her head once, her attention wandering past him to the crowd beginning to gather beyond the light. She could see all of her housemates, plus Jacquie, Diana, and Master Robert in the crowd. She couldn’t think of a single thing she needed to do, except for running from this room.

‘Look at me,’ he said again, and again, Hermione raised her eyes to his. ‘Focus on me,’ he told her. ‘Keep your focus on me, on what I’m doing and what I’m saying, and you will be fine.’

Shakily, Hermione nodded her head. Even though she had disobeyed him and given offence in public, the punishment she was about to endure was between her and her Master. The room was full of naked submissives. In addition to the red-heads, Kell and T were unclothed, as were others gathered about whose names Hermione could not recall. Her nudity simply placed her in the social norm for this group. Other than that, all she faced now was a whipping with a leather strap, and had not every whipping she’d ever received been more of a pleasure than a pain?

He spoke to her again, this time, his voice pitched so that everyone could hear him. ‘Do you have anything you wish to say?’ he asked her.

They hadn’t discussed this part, but Hermione needed no instruction to know how to answer. ‘I apologise, Master,’ she said sincerely, and he nodded his head once.

‘Remove your cloak and face the cross,’ he instructed her.

Hermione faced the cross and unfastened the cape, allowing it to fall to the floor. Immediately, her Master was behind her, and she concentrated on his voice and his hands upon her, leaving no room for self-consciousness at her nudity.

‘Extend your arms along the upper planks,’ he instructed, and she obeyed, conscious of his workman-like exertions, adjusting the wrist cuffs to the proper height and securing them with exacting precision.

Up close to the cross for the first time, Hermione saw that the lower planks were not solid, but provided a space for the submissive’s feet to fit through the wood, permitting the binding of her ankles. Her Master paid the same close attention to securing her lower extremities that he had paid the upper ones, then he stepped around the cross to look down into her face. Hermione gave him a tremulous smile, focusing on him with all her might. With a flourish of his wrist, the leather strap was in his hand, and he held it before her face.

‘It is customary for the submissive to greet the strap with affection,’ he said, and without a thought, Hermione pressed her lips to the leather.
‘Good girl,’ he murmured, and then he was gone.

Hermione stared at the wall, which was the only thing she could see. She wished her Master had offered her the blindfold; it was always so easy to go into sub-space with sight restricted, but this wasn’t supposed to be easy for her, was it? It didn’t matter; if she focussed on his voice and his actions, she would achieve the state of mind he intended for her.

She was aware of her Master’s proximity, and her hair was twisted up and secured. Then the strap stroked from her nape to the cleft of her buttocks.

‘You may begin to count, little slut,’ he said, his voice for her ears alone, and the first blow fell across her buttocks.

The pain was a burning flash stinging her flesh and making her see lights at the periphery of her vision where there were none. This was nothing like being spanked with his belt. The belt was less than half as wide as the strap, and though folding it over increased its impact, it didn’t hold a candle to the wallop packed by the leather strap.

‘Count,’ the stern voice commanded.

Hermione licked her lips and managed to croak, ‘One,’ just before the second blow fell, drawing a cry from her. ‘T-two,’ she stuttered.

The third blow fell upon the upper portion of her left thigh, wrapping slightly about her upper leg, and she felt the shock of pleasure it sent to her clitoris at the same time she realised that this implement was going to bruise her as she had not been bruised before. ‘Three,’ she said, and the strap found her other leg, wrapping again, slapping on the softness of her inner thigh, sending a tremor to her clitoris. ‘F-four,’ she gasped, wishing she had a dildo to ride during this exercise. With a thick cock in her cunt, the strap would feel even better. The fifth blow caught her lower buttocks, managing to impact the edge of her aching labia, drawing an animalistic moan from her instead of ‘five’.

Then she heard his voice before her, and she opened her eyes to see him standing on the other side of the cross again, his breathing somewhat unsteady, the pronounced tent in his trousers tweaking the intensity of her want. His black eyes were glittering as he slipped a finger between her labia lips, teasing her clitoris.

‘You’re so wet,’ he murmured, and she knew he wanted to take her right now, to pull out his cock and fuck her where they stood.

‘Please,’ she whimpered, her hips rocking on his fingers.

‘You need not count for the last bit,’ he told her, and her eyes opened wide.

There was going to be more? But surely a second blow to any spot he had already struck would really hurt?

Then he was gone, and the sixth blow fell as the first had done, wringing a cry from Hermione. The arousal was still slick between her thighs, but oh! The pain was more than she had endured before, and though she had hoped not to do so in public, she began to cry.

The seventh blow mirrored the second, escalating her cries to sobs. The next two mirrored those that
had teased her inner thighs, but the sobs were too advanced to rein them in. Every feeling of anger and resentment and rebellion fell from her with the hot tears, and by the time the tenth blow fell, kissing the edge of her slick, needy mons, she was completely beyond herself, a passenger in the vehicle of her Master’s discipline.

His fingers were quick upon the buckles, releasing first her ankles, then her wrists. She pressed her bare back against his chest, cringing from contact of any sort on her bottom, and he reached around her, wiping her face with a soft linen handkerchief. Then his fist wrapped around the link from which her lead dangled, and he pulled her into a kiss, his tongue forceful and insistent as he plundered her mouth. She clung to him, and he lifted her, arm beneath her knees, and strode to the nearest sofa, away from the glare of the lights.

‘I am very pleased,’ he murmured into her hair, standing her on her feet, and he kissed her mouth again, drawing her hand to the bulge in his trousers. ‘Unwrap your reward.’

Hermione felt a bit unsteady on her feet, adrenaline coursing through her body, colliding with the feral greed she felt for her Master’s swollen cock. She attacked his belt with Gryffindor determination, unfastening the flies and sliding down his front to take him in her mouth. The salty emission on the glistening, darkened tip of his penis sang in her mouth like fine wine, but he was falling back onto the sofa, drawing her to straddle him. She sank onto him, taking his entire length in one go, and they both groaned. She leaned up, rising to slide down again, and he fastened his mouth greedily to an erect nipple, sucking for all he was worth.

Hermione availed herself of the cock she had so wanted during her whipping, knowing there were figures in the shadows who watched their coupling, but too far gone in urgency to care. She rode the magnificent erect cock of Severus Snape, keenly aware of his hand upon the chain of her lead, keeping her close as he suckled at her breast and thrust up into her as if his life depended on it. She looked down at his inky hair, seeing his eyes closed, his mouth on her breast, felt the girth of his cock spreading her, fucking her, and loved him as she had never done before. She wanted the moment to go on and on.

But their ardour mounted, for neither had the wherewithal to slow their pace. His eyes fluttered open, his expression unguarded, and he spoke in gravelly, ragged tones. ‘Oh, fuck, Hermione—come with me.’ The hand at her waist slipped between them, the pads of his fingers flattened against her clitoris. ‘Now,’ he gasped, ‘now!’

And she arched her neck, feeling her hair come loose and tumble down her back just as she was filled with the heat and radiance of their joining, his seed rushing into her, his face pressed into the curve of her throat, the cry torn from his throat at once more impassioned and less restrained than any she had yet heard from him, in any encounter they had shared. She twined her fingers in his hair, feeling the pulsing of her climax pushing out to flood every cell of her body with light. When she finally stilled, she saw his cheek pressed to her chest, the fingers of one hand fondling the links of her lead chain.

Awash in transcendence, she stroked his hair and kissed his face, expressing through touch the things he would never permit her to say.

A/N: You may view the photograph which inspired the end of this chapter at the link below. It is on a Live Journal community called ftpma_dishing. It is Non-Work Safe with nudity and sexual
content:

Community dot livejournal dot com frontslash ftpma underscore dishing frontslash 1831 dot html

You may see a photograph of a St Andrews Cross on the same community at:

Community dot livejournal dot com frontslash ftpma underscore dishing frontslash 2552 dot html
Chapter 52: Disclosures and Departures

A/N: S & M refers to sado-masochism.

For the Potions Master’s Amusement

Chapter 52: Disclosures and Departures

Hermione opened her eyes and smiled to see her professor leaning over her. He had Disapparated them back to their room, where he had put her in the bath with a medicated oil to soothe the bruises on her backside, then he had tucked her up for a rest and sat in a chair beside her until she slept.

‘What time is it?’ she asked, reaching a hand to stroke his cheek.

He studied her face, his dark eyes intent. ‘Six o’clock,’ he informed her. ‘I would like for you to accompany me down to dinner. Will you come?’

Hermione sat up, noting the soreness of her bottom. ‘Of course,’ she said, swinging her legs over the side of the bed. She would have preferred to have dinner in their room—after all, he was leaving soon, something she had trouble remembering without wanting to cry—and hadn’t Rafe stayed in their rooms for the best part of a week before going amongst their housemates? But her Master had his reasons, she was sure, and if he wanted her by his side at the dinner table, she wanted to be there. She was a little worried about how she would feel to see and be seen by those who had watched her punishment (seen her naked!), but she was mostly over that sort of concern. She had engaged in enthusiastic public love-making without a qualm, so it was rather ridiculous to worry about having shown her bum and fanny to people, wasn’t it? They had seen her in far more intimate circumstances.

He dressed her with his own hands, and he apparently thought she needed very little to wear. He seemed to very much enjoy encasing her smooth legs in black stay-ups, lapping at her naked nether parts until she clutched at his hair, then leaving her aching as he stood to drop her black party dress over her head. The short skirt earned a smirk of approval from her Master.

‘You smell divine,’ he told her, bending to kiss her lips. ‘You’ll be sitting down to eat your dinner, and all you’ll be able to smell is your own scent.’ Then he opened the door and gestured her to precede him into the corridor.

Downstairs, Hermione was surprised to see that her usual place beside Kell was not available. Instead, her Master led her to the end of the table, to the place usually occupied by Master Claudius. He pulled out the chair immediately to the right of the end seat, as if they were at a formal dinner. She saw a spasm of amusement cross his features, and following his gaze, she saw a soft cushion had been placed on her chair. She looked quickly down the table, and Taffy gave her a tiny, knowing smile. With an answering smile of thanks, Hermione eased down onto the seat, her sore bottom sending a painful reminder in spite of her friend’s thoughtfulness.

When her Master had seated himself, the house-elves began to serve.

Hermione found she had a good appetite, having eaten nothing but porridge all day, so she enjoyed her dinner. She was fascinated to observe the deference with which Professor Snape was treated by the others at table, and she listened avidly to the conversation going on about her. Hermione learned that Simon Curtis had been delivered back to Sussex by Master Claudius, directly to Master Thorn,
who had written the letter of introduction Simon had used to gain access to Roissy House. Master Thorn had withdrawn Simon’s visiting privileges to the Sussex D/s gatherings, and his companion, Jason, had been placed on probation.

‘He got off lightly, if you ask me,’ Reggie said, glowering at his plate. ‘I would have been happy to give him a taste of the bull whip.’

Hermione darted a glance at Kell, who was beaming at Reggie, her cheeks flushed a becoming pink. Master Claudius bent to speak to Kell, and her face fell, her eyes averted.

The next topic of conversation concerned an upcoming meeting of the board of directors for Roissy House, and then there was discussion of a new piece of equipment for the Dungeon. By the time Hermione was polishing off her spotted dick, the Dominants were retiring to their Study for cigars and cognac.

Hermione felt at loose ends with the absence of her Master, so she was glad when t took her hand and led her to a sofa near the fire in the sitting room. Kell sat on Hermione’s other side, as on Hermione’s first night at Roissy House. The three girls were exchanging desultory remarks about the weekend when Elinore and Vi approached them, both looking purposeful. Vi squeezed in next to Kell, and Elinore situated her chair so that she faced the sofa.

Elinore nodded to each one of them individually before she spoke. ‘Violet already knows my story, but I’d like to relate it to you girls.’ She smiled wryly. ‘It’s a bit of a cautionary tale.’

Hermione sat a bit straighter, her curiosity piqued. Because of Elinore’s significant part in Professor Snape’s life, she had always been interested in Elinore Hunter.

‘Although it’s difficult for you to imagine it,’ Elinore began, ‘I was once a young and beautiful woman, just as you are.’ She wrinkled her nose, to show that she meant the self-deprecation humorously. ‘I was in a vanilla marriage and was the mother of two little girls, but I was dissatisfied with my life. I would go out at night to clubs, trying to find what seemed to be missing in me. One night, I met Hadrian.’ A sweet, reminiscent smile touched her lips, drawing soft looks from all of her auditors. ‘He taught me about myself, about what I want and what I need and how to have those things satisfied.’

Her expression sobered, and she looked into the middle distance, lost in the past. ‘Hadrian’s training made me a better wife and a better mother. I learned to consider the needs of others above my own, and my home life stabilised. I was only able to spend two or three evenings a week with Hadrian, but that time was what formed my character and held me together. In summer, my girls went to spend two months with their grandparents, and I would take that time to spend here, at Roissy House. My husband must have known I was involved with another man, but he pretended all was well, so we continued on as before.’

Elinore’s attention returned to the faces of the girls before her, and she looked sad. ‘After a few years, even under Hadrian’s influence, I began to chafe again, wanting more excitement. Hadrian had never been overly strict with me; he allowed me to play with other Dominants, providing I had his prior permission. He was generous with me, beyond what many men would have been. Even so, I had a streak of wildness, and I went against his wishes. I sought out the S & M clubs, where some of the more violent acts are practiced.’

Hermione felt anxiety coiling in her at the relation of this narrative, realising that a cautionary tale wasn’t going to be a happy story, but still finding it difficult to listen easily.

Elinore shook her head. ‘It is difficult from this time in my life to look back and believe how reckless
I was. I went to the club without telling anyone where I had gone. I met up with a very persuasive, charismatic wizard—a sexually exciting man with an aura of danger about him. I actually found that attractive.’ Her hands twisted in her lap, as if in protest of her words. ‘He convinced me to go to his home, where he claimed to have superior play equipment. I voluntarily surrendered my wand to him for safekeeping and permitted him to bind me. I had broken every rule of safe conduct I had ever learned at Roissy House, and I was about to become a living example of why one should follow the rules.’

Hermione heard a murmur of distress to her left, and then t slipped onto the rug on her knees, her hands capturing Elinore’s in an effort to comfort the older witch.

Elinore looked down at t and stroked her soft, fair hair. ‘You remind me of my older daughter,’ Elinore murmured. ‘Have I ever mentioned that before?’

Taffy nodded, tears falling from her blue eyes.

‘Don’t cry, dearest,’ Elinore said. ‘I was mad and foolish and got what was coming to me.’

Even Vi shook her head at this. ‘No, Elinore,’ Vi said quietly. ‘It was irresponsible and stupid, but no one deserves what happened to you.’

Elinore sighed deeply, and Hermione and Kell exchanged looks of profound unease.

‘I was shackled and beaten and violated and beaten again,’ Elinore said, her voice hollow. ‘I was suspended until injury was done to my arms, penetrated vaginally and anally by objects too large for my body, and kept prisoner in the rapist’s cellar for three days, although it seemed like three years.’

Taffy was openly sobbing, her tears dampening Elinore’s neat mauve robes, while Hermione and Kell clung to each other’s hands, sickened looks upon their pale faces.

‘By the time Magical Law Enforcement found me—answering a neighbour’s complaints about strange sounds from next door—my captor had resorted to using his fists and his booted feet.’ Elinore reached a hand behind her, fingers coming to rest near the small of her back. ‘It was apparently a kick which robbed me of my ability to walk.’

‘Oh, Elinore,’ Kell said, her voice thick with unshed tears.

‘Severus and Reg were right to step in to help you, Kell,’ Elinore said. ‘I’m sorry we ever let that young man through the door of Roissy House.’

Kell sobbed out loud, and Hermione was surprised to see Vi pull the younger witch into a hug. Hermione frowned; she still had questions.

‘What happened to your attacker, ma’am?’ Hermione asked.

‘He was never apprehended,’ Elinore replied. ‘I worry sometimes that he’ll come for me—to finish the job, you know—but I feel quite safe here, for the most part.’

They sat quietly together for a space, five women in deep reflection. Then Kell spoke again, sounding as if her throat hurt. ‘What became of your husband and daughters?’ she asked.

Elinore Summoned a box of tissues and offered it first to Taffy, then to Kell. ‘My husband divorced me while I was still in hospital,’ she admitted. ‘The entire episode was in the Daily Prophet, and he could no longer pretend we were just a normal, average couple. My daughters haven’t spoken to me since then.’
‘They’ll get over it,’ Violet said firmly, sounding as if she had spoken these words before. ‘They’re grown up, now.’

Elinore smiled, and her features lightened. ‘They are grown now,’ she agreed. ‘Severus had them in his classes when they were at school, and he kept me apprised of their progress then. Now, I send cards on their birthdays and each year at Christmas.’ She took a deep breath and sat straighter. ‘One day, they’ll respond.’ She was quiet for a moment, then she resumed her narrative. ‘When I was released from hospital, Hadrian brought me here, to Roissy House, and I’ve been here ever since. We married after a few years, and I’ve been very happy.’ She looked around at the younger women. ‘You are all my family now. I have received a great deal of happiness from being a submissive woman, and disability has not put an end to my learning.’

A house-elf popped into the room with a tea tray, and as a group, the witches heaved a sigh of relief. ‘I think we could all do with a cup of tea,’ Taffy said, rising and going to take up the teapot.

Hermione accepted her cup and saucer from Taffy and remained on her feet, drinking the comforting brew. For now, it was a bit more comfortable to stand than to sit. Kell stood beside her, meditatively sipping, and after a moment, Hermione spoke to her in quiet tones. ‘Were you in trouble for what Simon did?’

Kell turned bright blue eyes to Hermione’s face. ‘No, I’m not held responsible for what he did,’ she said, ‘but I’ve been talked to quite a bit about signs I might have noticed which would have been a tip-off that he was impaired.’ Her eyes slid to Elinore. ‘I can understand now why everyone here is a bit hyper-vigilant about that kind of thing.’

Hermione nodded gravely.

‘Elinore has history with all the Dominants here tonight, except for Reg,’ Kell said. ‘She took part in training Master Severus and Master Maximus, and she has played with Master Claudius. They’re all very fond of her.’ She sounded a little wistful.

Hermione touched her arm. ‘I’m sure those who know you are fond of you, as well,’ she said. ‘I certainly am.’

Kell looked surprised, then leaned in to press a quick kiss to Hermione’s cheek. ‘Thank you,’ she said.

Soon, the Dominants came into the room with a puff of cigar smoke, which Elinore dispersed with a wave of her wand. Hermione smiled to see her professor, and though he did not smile in return, the expression in his eyes make her tummy flip over. He sat in an armchair at the far end of the room and motioned her over to him. She placed her tea things on the tray and crossed to him eagerly. The slightest movement of his chin invited her into his lap, and she lowered herself to his legs. He tugged her against him, then his hand slid down her hip to the smooth nylon hold-ups on her upper thigh, giving her the lightest squeeze. Her lips parted, the sensation going straight to her clitoris, and in an instant, from naught but the sight of him, the scent of him, and his fingertips upon her leg, she was in a rage of desire for him.

‘What?’ he murmured, watching the emotions play over her face.

‘You’re like my own personal form of insanity,’ she said.

He grasped the hair at her nape and pulled, tilting her head back and baring her neck to him. ‘That may be the best compliment I’ve ever received,’ he said, his voice amused, and then his lips were on her throat.
‘I never thought I’d see such a public display from you, Sev.’

Hermione was surprised to hear a less than dignified snort from the region below her chin, then her Master’s face raised, a sneer on his lips.

‘This,’ he drawled, ‘from the least decorous individual ever to grace the Slytherin common room.’

Rafe dropped into the armchair across from Professor Snape, pulling t down upon his legs. ‘Do me the courtesy of not recounting all of my youthful indiscretions for my wife’s edification,’ he complained.

‘Don’t invite the attack,’ Professor Snape advised.

Hermione looked from Rafe to her Master and back again. She had supposed they would interact much as Harry and Ron did, plus twenty years of life experience, but watching her professor with his best mate truly was like seeing a different man altogether. She saw that t was smiling complacently as she listened to this interchange; obviously, she was used to it. Hermione felt a slight pang, that t knew so much more about Severus Snape that she did, but she pushed that notion aside. She had years of discoveries ahead of her, and she was thankful for that. With a purr of contentment, she pressed her face to her professor’s neck and twined her fingers in his long, lank hair. She spent a timeless space in this way, safe in the shelter of his arms, his baritone rumbling beneath her ear, her hands upon his face, upon his throat, fingers threading through his hair. He lolled beneath her ministrations in the company of these people, his attitude demonstrating to her more clearly than words had ever done how he considered the denizens of Roissy House to be his family. In turn, he was showing them, by his actions, the depth of his regard for her.

She listened to the teasing, desultory banter between the two men, with occasional interpolations from t, and she was satisfied to be the fourth wheel of this vehicle—necessary for smooth operation but content in silence. She could visualise, in years to come, that she would be a full participant in these exchanges, but for now, she was supremely happy just to be included.

After a time, Professor Snape shifted, and he buried his nose behind her ear, taking a deep breath of her hair. ‘I want to tie you to my bed and flog your breasts, then lick you all over, little one,’ he murmured. ‘Do you have any objection to that?’

Hermione deliberately squirmed her bottom over the stirring bulge in his trousers. ‘None, sir,’ she promised.

He chuckled and urged her to her feet before standing as well. ‘You’ll excuse us?’ he said with mock courtesy to the Lestranges.

Rafe glanced up into his friend’s face, a frown between his brows. ‘It is getting to be that time,’ he said soberly.

Hermione felt a clutch of dread at Rafe’s tone, but she pushed it aside. She and her professor paused to wish the others a goodnight, but Hermione could not ignore the fact that her Master was not saying goodnight to them—he was saying goodbye. Sick with dismay, she clung to his left arm, and with his right he shook hands with the other Dominants, stooped to press a kiss to Elinore’s cheek, and he bid a civil farewell to Vi and Kell. Then he propelled Hermione before him, out of the room, and she was stumbling along the corridor toward the stairwell, her eyes blurred with tears.

‘Stupid bird,’ Professor Snape muttered, and she dashed the tears from her eyes. He was glaring at Pigwidgeon, who fluttered about above their heads, hooting in merry excitement.
'It's Pig,' Hermione said, reaching a hand to Ron's tiny owl.

But Pigwidgeon answered the professor's terse, 'Here!' and offered his leg.

'It's probably for me,' Hermione said, watching her professor's deft fingers make quick work of the leather thong binding the letter to its carrier.

'Unlikely,' he snapped, and she saw with some surprise that he was correct; it was Severus Snape written on the parchment in Harry's uneven hand. The professor snapped the parchment open and read it through, then spoke to the owl. 'There will be no answer,' he said. 'Go.'

Pig twittered gleefully and flew in circles over their heads for a moment before shooting off down the hall, and Hermione supposed the house-elf that had let him in would let him out, again. Professor Snape grasped Hermione's hand and led the way upstairs. When they were in their room, he pressed her against the door, pushing her arms up and pinning her wrists with one large hand, thrusting a knee between her legs and applying pressure to her mons even as he nipped at her earlobe.

'Your friends simply wrote to report they did not find the book they sought at the place they looked for it,' he said, his free hand passing lightly over her breast, down to her waist. 'Now, if you please, I would like to have your focus on me.'

Hermione raised her lips to his, perfectly happy to give him her full attention. He kissed her hungrily, never letting up the pressure he applied between her legs, and Hermione unashamedly rubbed herself on his trouser leg, her clitoris aching for him to finish what he had begun when he dressed her.

At last, he stepped back, releasing her wrists, and removed her black dinner dress, letting it drop to the floor. Then he led her to the bed. 'Keep on the nylons,' he said. 'Take off the shoes. Lie down spread eagle. I’ve decided not to tie you, but I will if you can’t keep your hands above your head.’

Hermione moved to her place in the middle of the mattress, her bottom smarting at the friction of the bedding against her skin. Still, she was glad her hands were free. That meant, if he fucked her—and surely he would—she would be able to hold him and touch him. It would be their last time for a while, and she very much wanted to feel his naked skin beneath her hands one more time.

He turned from the wardrobe with her flogger in his hand, and he gently trailed the strands along her tummy, then he swished the strands over first one breast, then the other.

'Lovely,' he murmured, and she saw that he looked at her hungrily.

Frequently, he disciplined her with his clothes on, but he stopped to strip naked, skin more golden than sallow in the candlelight. When his arm rose to bring the flogger down on her, she watched the ripple of muscles on his torso, and the beauty of the sight combined with the delightful sting of the flogger strands upon her flesh to draw a cry of enjoyment from her lips.

He worked her over thoroughly, not neglecting any portion of torso or pudendum, ending with a delightful volley of tingling blows to her quim, and at his command, she raised her knees and spread her thighs wide to receive the attention.

He moved between the vee-shape of her thighs and spread her labia wide with clever, knowing fingers. 'No cunt on earth smells like yours, pet,' he purred, nuzzling the swell of flesh above her slit, his breath ghosting over her needful clitoris, an exquisite tease. ‘Dear Merlin, but I’ll miss this.’

His wicked tongue darted out, the tip caressing her clitoris, bringing her hips up in protest.

‘You need this,’ he told her, using the flat of his tongue to lick her from perineum to clitoris and back
again.

She cried out, ‘Yes! I do! Please!’

His tongue lapped at the excessive moisture at her opening, then pressed inside, as if he were fucking her with his tongue. The bridge of his great, hooked nose rubbed over her pleasure centre, teasing, without quite satisfying. She squirmed at his ministrations, fingers scrubbling at his scalp, knowing better than to try to move his face. She had learned early on that he would not be hurried.

‘Greedy little slut,’ he murmured, licking higher, half stroking his tongue over the bottom of her clitoris. ‘You need my mouth on your cunt every hour of every day, don’t you?’

‘Please, Master,’ she gasped, undulating beneath his mouth. ‘I do need you. Please.’

He slipped his first two fingers inside her body, curving and beginning the in, out rhythm she craved.

‘Yesss,’ she said, moving with him as he fucked her with his fingers.

‘Now what, pet?’ he asked, as if he did not know very well what she wanted next.

‘Suck me, Master, please,’ she begged. ‘Please!’

His lips closed over the protrusion of her sex as if he were kissing her mouth, sucking gently on her clitoris as if it were her tongue, finally flattening it with his tongue and increasing the movement of his fingers. He thrust harder, his fingertips making contact with her sweet spot. Hermione screamed, unable to prevent her reaction, and she thrashed beneath him as he sucked and finger fucked her to orgasm, surrendering herself completely to the sensations he afforded.

He moved up her body as she shuddered with the aftershocks of coming, his hands and lips caressing and possessing. When he reached her mouth, he kissed her, and she clung to him, the tears which had come with her climax seasoning their kiss. He did not stop there, though, but he continued to move up, until his knees were on either side of her head, and the slick, salty tip of his penis was at her lips.

‘That’s a good girl,’ he said as she greedily lapped at him before closing her lips over his knob.

As he moved carefully in her mouth, she watched his face, which showed both intense concentration and immense pleasure. Dragging air in through her nose, she applied more suction and was gratified by his groan and the sneering twist of his lips; he never looked so viciously dangerous as when he allowed himself to relax and take his pleasure between her lips. She raised her hands to grasp his arse cheeks, gently squeezing and urging him, but he kept his strokes shallow; apparently he did not mean to spill himself down her throat this time. With that knowledge, she contented herself with running her hands along his flanks, up his thighs, feeling those muscles move beneath her hands as she swirled her tongue along the soft underside of his cock, wanting to mark and remember every moment of this last encounter.

He pulled out of her mouth and sagged to one side, sitting upright against the headboard. ‘Come sit on my cock,’ he growled, and Hermione responded with alacrity. She straddled him, using her hand to guide him to her entrance, then she slid down onto his length with a sigh of bliss. Dear Circe, but she had been born to hold this man inside her body, to create with him the friction that brought them both to this place of such complete union.

His hands settled at her hips, guiding her movements as he jerked and thrust below her, piercing and cleaving her. ‘Look at me, pet,’ he commanded, and she willingly obeyed, looking into his endless eyes, reaching out for his consciousness even as she felt his passage into her mind.
When she reciprocated, slipping into his mind, she was met with a wall of emotion so fierce that she wobbled to one side, losing her balance. He pulled her back into position, never losing contact with her, and she was amazed to feel less resistance from him than at any other time she had joined with him in this way. He seemed eager to bathe in her emotions, and she could sense him slowing his movements to prolong their coupling, providing more time for them to be joined in mind, body and …

... yes, in soul, he confirmed.

Hermione cupped his face, moving up and down slowly on his cock, and his hands rose from her waist to cup her breasts. She sighed as he squeezed, and then his thumbs passed over her nipples, sending a shiver through her. Her vaginal muscles contracted, and his eyes closed in bliss. She did it again, deliberately, and he groaned. The doubling of sensation was mesmerising, everything she felt was broadcast to him, and he responded back to her, broadcasting his pleasure and her own, which she returned to him. The progression was like being spun in a whirlpool of emotion and sensation.

Hermione felt the moment when he could no longer hold out against the mounting pressure low in his abdomen, and one of his hands pinched at her nipples, even as the other dipped to her quim, delving for and finding her clitoris. She stroked her hands down his chest, fingertips teasing his nipples, and surrendered to his will, allowing him to draw her climax from her. She rode the swell of sensation, her gaze fixed on his, until they began, together, to fall, spinning and spiralling as one, her climax shattering all around her as the heat of his seed pumped into her body, and still, their eyes were locked, their experience irrevocably linked.

She sagged forward, suddenly exhausted, and he held her to him, their bodies still joined. His fingers stroked her back, and he pressed kisses to her sweat-damp face.

Do you have to go? She didn’t want to ask, but she had to know. Their minds were still connected, and she slipped the question to him, rather than speak aloud.

At dawn, he answered, and she tumbled sideways, bringing him down half atop of her.

Hold me, she begged.

He pressed his sticky, sweaty body to hers and held on.

She dozed because she couldn’t help it, but she didn’t sleep for long. The dark of the night stretched beyond their windows, and she longed to push the dawn away, prolonging their time together. She knew from his breathing that he was awake.

‘I’m the only one you ever collared,’ she said.

He did not seem surprised to hear her speak. ‘You are,’ he agreed.

‘Why didn’t you do it before?’

He was quiet for a long time, though his breathing didn’t change. She knew he hadn’t fallen asleep, and she wondered if he had decided not to answer her.

‘It was not an option,’ he said at last, his voice clear in the firelit room. ‘I spent summers here, when I was not required elsewhere. Elinore kept a room for me. It was my home. I could participate in the training of submissives who were under someone else’s care, but there was no question of me taking long-term responsibility for another person. I had my job, which precluded that type of arrangement, and though I enjoyed the odd short Christmas or Easter holiday, where I might have a one-night
encounter with a willing submissive, any training I did was for my own amusement, with the clear understanding that the submissive in training would pass into the care of another Dominant.’

Hermione still felt the thrum of the connection between their minds; she could no more be upset or take offence at anything he said than she could willingly walk away from him. She had asked, he had answered, and she could only accept his words.

‘Training submissives was for your amusement?’ she asked.

He moved her from her spot on his chest and slipped down so that they were face-to-face in the dim light. ‘Yes,’ he answered. ‘There was nothing I enjoyed more, but my circumstances prevented any deeper involvement.’

She moved up on her elbow, looking down at him. ‘I don’t understand why you made an exception for me.’ She spoke softly. There was no challenge in voice, no accusation—she was truly puzzled.

He didn’t move but let her loom over him. ‘I am a selfish bastard,’ he reminded her.

‘Tell me what your plans are,’ she coaxed. ‘It will help me, when you’re gone, to have something to plan for.’

He sat up in one fluid movement, his back to her as he sat on the edge of the bed. ‘I have made arrangements for you,’ he said bleakly.

Hermione pushed herself up and encircled him with her arms, pressing her cheek to his shoulder blade. ‘Tell me about them,’ she invited him.

He remained stiff in her arms. ‘You have all my privileges at Roissy House,’ he informed her. ‘You have a home here for as long as you wish it. In the case of my … demise, Hadrian knows what to do. I don’t have much, but what I have will come to you.’

Hermione listened to him, still feeling the echoes of their union, and knew he was speaking the absolute truth. Releasing him, she slipped past him and took up her wand. ‘Lumos,’ she said.

He blinked against the bright light.

‘You’ve made me your heir?’ she demanded. ‘You’ve made arrangements for me in case you die?’ Her voice was rising in volume, but she couldn’t help herself.

‘Hermione,’ he said heavily, and one long-fingered hand passed over his face. ‘I will say this once, and then I want you to let it go—do you understand me?’

She bristled, recognising the tone of his voice. He was quite resolute: He meant what he said. There would be no further discussion. She bit her lip.

‘There is a strong likelihood that I will not survive this conflict. You know how precariously I am placed. I will do my duty, and I will do everything I can to save my own skin, but we must face facts.’

‘No!’ she cried.

He rose and jerked her against him. ‘We are not going to indulge in some ridiculous, melodramatic emotional scene,’ he said forcefully. ‘But I’ll tell you what we will do. We will both do what we are supposed to do.’ He had her face pressed to his chest, where her tears wet this skin; his free hand rubbed circles on her back. He continued to speak as if he were not cradling a sobbing girl. ‘You will
live here and remain safe. You will revise for your NEWTs. You will pay extra attention to the Ancient Runes text I brought. When Potter sends you the counter-spell, you’ll decipher it and record it in your journal for me. You’ll be a good, obedient girl, and I will come to you when I can.’

With superhuman strength, she pulled away from him. ‘Unless you’re dead!’ she screeched.

He wrapped his hand around her wrist and pulled her into the bathroom. ‘Unless I’m dead,’ he agreed grimly, pulling her into the shower and twisting the taps.

Swaddled in her warm dressing gown, she sat on the floor between his knees as he brushed out her freshly washed hair. The clock on the mantle ticked the minutes past, and Hermione felt as if it were a time bomb rather than a time piece.

‘Elinore told her story tonight,’ she said, the first words she had spoken since before their shower. ‘Hadrian said she would,’ he answered.

‘It was horrible,’ she said. ‘Why wasn’t her kidnapper caught?’

Her professor paused for a moment in his methodical brushing. ‘I have my theories,’ he admitted, almost as if speaking to himself.

Hermione attempted to turn her face, but he prevented her, resuming his brushing. ‘Tell me,’ she said.

‘The timing was curious,’ he admitted. ‘Elinore was attacked the summer of eighty-one.’

Hermione pondered. ‘That’s the year Harry’s parents died.’

‘Yes,’ he agreed.

‘What are you saying?’ He didn’t speak, and Hermione succeeded in turning around. ‘What?’ she asked again.

‘I think Elinore’s attacker may very well have been the Dark Lord,’ he said.

Her mouth dropped open. ‘Severus!’ she gasped.

He grasped her upper arms and pulled her up into his lap. ‘Say it again,’ he commanded, his burning eyes fixed on her mouth.

‘Severus,’ she repeated, and he kissed her. Hermione wound her arms about his neck, allowing herself to be lured from horror and alarm to the simple pleasure of being kissed by the man she loved. There would be time and enough for wondering, but the time for holding her Master was swiftly running out.

Too soon, he put her from him and went to the wardrobe, attiring himself in the clothes he had worn upon his arrival. Hermione scrambled into her own clothing, determined to stay with him for as long as she possibly could. He put on a heavy travelling cloak over his clothes, and she jammed her feet into her trainers, holding his hand tightly as they traversed the corridors down to the entrance hall.

Rafe and t were there already, locked in a fraught embrace, and the mere sight of them made it all more real to Hermione. Her feelings were a complete jumble, but rising to the top was her desperate desire for her Master not to leave her. She stopped on the second step from the bottom, refusing to complete the climb down, as if to do so would keep him with her for one more precious minute.
He turned to her when he realised she had stopped, and he plucked her from the step as if she weighed nothing. In desperation, she wrapped her arms and legs around him.

‘I love you,’ she reminded him, her lips on the pulse in his throat.

He didn’t speak, but he took her chin in one hand and forced her face up so he could kiss her mouth. Then he broke her hold about his neck, and she released his waist, sliding to the floor.

‘Be a good girl,’ he adjured her sternly, glaring down into her face.

She studied his hawkish countenance by the light of the wall braziers, feeling day breaking beyond the walls of Roissy House as surely as do the night-blooming flowers. His black hair hung like curtains on either side of his narrow face, and his thin lips were pressed in an uncompromising, firm line—yet she was sure she saw tenderness in his expression.

‘Come back to me,’ she responded, her chin raised obstinately, determined not to cry.

Rafe and Taffy broke apart, and for a fleeting moment, Severus Snape’s fingertips were upon Hermione’s cheek in a final caress. Then the Roissy House doors were thrown open by the waiting house-elves, and a faint yellow light limned the bare tree branches of Grosvenor Square as Masters Maximus and Severus swept out into the new day.

And Hermione and Taffy fell into one another’s arms, giving in to the tears they would not show their departing warriors.
Winter deepened, and time passed slowly. Hermione put aside her studies, save for the new text her professor had brought to her, and she immersed herself in the unfamiliar material. Reading the text was laborious, as it had been written in Middle English. It was bizarre to think that the book dated back a mere seven hundred years, but the Elder Futhark runic language had been in use in the first century, nearly two thousand years ago.

Struggling over the book gave her frequent headaches, but plunging into its study kept her too busy to dwell on the thought of Severus—yes, Severus—in an undisclosed location, in frequent danger, separated from her by more than mere miles. Though she wasn’t perfect in her ability to push thoughts of him out of her mind, she was fairly successful and managed to put off her immersion in him until she was in her bed each night, opening her journal with trembling hands, praying with all her might that she would find his spiky writing there.

Other times of weakness were when she spent time alone with Taffy. Taffy had stood up well to her time away from Rafe when he had been in prison, but having him go away from her again after such a short reunion seemed, somehow, doubly hard for her. Hermione sat with her sympathetically on those nights when the house-elf, Pitty, came and asked Hermione to go up to Rafe and Taffy’s rooms. Taffy’s decline seemed quite obvious to Hermione, and she wondered that no one else at Roissy House seemed as concerned as she felt. Taffy’s usually sunny mien had become morose, and her lovely rose complexion had become wan. Frequently, Hermione had held her tearful friend, murmuring comforting words as she had cried, ‘I’m sorry! I don’t know what’s wrong with me!’

‘You miss him,’ Hermione had answered simply.

The somewhat obvious answer came to them two weeks after the departure of Masters Maximus and Severus. By then, t’s appetite had diminished to the point that she had become far too thin. Pitty came for Hermione one morning, and entering the Lestranges’ bedroom, Hermione was concerned to find t lying listlessly upon her bed, her face the colour of the white bed sheets.

‘Fetch your mistress, please, Pitty,’ Hermione said worriedly. ‘We may need a Healer.’

‘No!’ Taffy protested weakly. ‘I don’t want to be mauled about. I just want to be left alone!’

Hermione advanced to the bedside, her brow puckered with concern. ‘I know you do,’ she said soothingly, ‘but think of what Rafe would want.’

This brought about a wave of tears, and Hermione was sitting on the side of the bed patting her friend and feeling ineffectual when Elinore glided in.

‘What’s this?’ the older witch said bracingly. ‘Tell me what’s wrong with you, t.’
‘I f-feel horrid,’ Taffy sobbed miserably. ‘I can’t keep anything down and even lifting my head from
the pillow makes me dizzy and sick.’

‘Bring a cool face flannel for her throat,’ Elinore said to Hermione, lifting her wand. ‘That always
helped me to feel less nauseous.’

Hermione stood, ready to assist, but doubtful. ‘Wouldn’t it be better to give her an antiemetic
potion?’ she asked.

Elinore did not answer, but lifted her wand, executing an elaborate figure eight over t’s prone body.
Hermione watched, fascinated, for she had never seen such a spell before, although it resembled in
some ways the diagnostic magic she had seen used by the Hogwarts matron, Madam Pomfrey.

‘Look!’ Elinore said, and the tone of her voice caused t to raise her head, her blue eyes wide.

A glowing, pear-shaped image glimmered in the air above t’s abdomen, and within the ghostly pear
there burned a fiery red spark, pulsating and visceral.

‘Oh!’ Taffy gasped, and she reached toward the hologram-like image, as if she could grasp it in her
hand.

Hermione, her errand forgotten, moved closer to the bed. ‘What is it?’ she whispered, as if to speak
too loudly would cause the image to wink out of sight.

‘That,’ Elinore said, her voice thick with the tears which glistened on her lashes, ‘is Taffy and Rafe’s
baby.’

Hermione looked quickly at t, whose previously wan face was flushed with colour. Taffy had
wanted this—had told Hermione she and Rafe were trying for a baby—why hadn’t it occurred to
Hermione that her friend might be pregnant? She shook her head ruefully; it had never crossed her
mind.

‘Hermione,’ Taffy said, and Hermione sat beside her, taking the hand t extended to her. ‘When you
write to Severus in your journal tonight, ask him to tell Rafe about the baby.’

Hermione was surprised. ‘But don’t you want to tell Rafe yourself?’ she asked.

‘We’re not allowed to send owls,’ Taffy pointed out. ‘I want him to know now—I don’t want to
wait.’ Her lips trembled for a moment. ‘If it will make him more careful, I want him to know as soon
as possible.’

And Hermione was confronted once again with a crying t. Helplessly, she looked to Elinore, who
moved closer to the bedside and took t’s other hand, speaking in a calm, firm voice. ‘All right, Taffy;
your pregnancy hormones are making your moods very changeable, but you have to try to stay calm,
for the baby’s sake.’

Taffy hiccupped and nodded, accepting the handkerchief Elinore passed her. Elinore caught
Hermione’s eye.

‘Please go find Vi,’ she said quietly. ‘She trained as a medi-witch after school and worked with
expectant mothers at St Mungo’s. She’ll know just what to do.’
With a final squeeze of t’s hand, Hermione left her with Elinore and struck off in search of Vi, wondering if she, one day, would be as tremblingly thankful to be pregnant with her Master’s baby.

The notion was both electrifying and terrifying.

At dinner the next evening, Taffy was the centre of attention. The mood at the table was celebratory, and toasts were drunk with sparkling cider, in deference to the pregnant woman. Hermione felt happier than she’d done since her Master had left, and she realised as she smiled at the teasing t endured from their friends that she had finally begun to feel at home at Roissy House.

Over pudding, Claudius cleared his throat. ‘Not to take away from t’s news, but our family has news, as well.’

Taffy looked excitedly at Vi. ‘You too?’ she cried.

Vi laughed, somewhat self-consciously, and said, ‘No! It’s not news about me—it’s about Kelly.’ Vi nodded her blond head toward Kell.

‘Kell has satisfactorily completed her training with us,’ Claudius announced, placing an arm around Vi even as he raised his glass again, with a nod to Kell. ‘We will begin sending out enquiries on her behalf this week, and we’ll begin screening potential Masters for her at the next play weekend.’

Hermione took up her glass of sparkling cider and turned to Kell, a smile of happiness on her lips for her friend. She was somewhat taken aback to see that Kell looked … well, she looked ambivalent, at best. Kell lifted her glass and smiled around the table, accepting the congratulations of all those seated around her, but Hermione couldn’t help but notice that she avoided everyone’s eyes—particularly Reg.

As for Reg, he bore an expression of determined good cheer. ‘Excellent news!’ he said a bit too loudly. ‘Claudius will find a good Dom for you, Kay.’

A sudden, uncomfortable silence fell over the table. Hermione looked from Reg, who looked embarrassed, to Claudius, who looked angry, to Hadrian, who looked disapproving, to Kell, who looked … devastated.

What had just happened?

Abruptly, Hadrian stood. ‘I don’t know about the rest of you,’ he said jovially, ‘but I could use a glass of cognac and one of those new cigars I ordered from Ecuador. What do you say?’

Reg stood and stalked out of the room, presumably to the Dominant’s Study, to be followed by Hadrian and Claudius. Hermione wanted to know why everyone was behaving so strangely, but she didn’t want to risk making things worse by asking.

‘Shall we go to the sitting room?’ Elinore said, just as she did every evening when the Dominants retired to their study.

Vi and t murmured their agreement, and Hermione stood, noticing how t waited for Kell to rise from her chair. Taffy folded Kell in a hug. Kell accepted the embrace before saying quietly, ‘I have a bit
of a headache. I’m going to make an early night of it.’

The dark-haired girl turned away from them and slipped into the corridor, and Hermione looked to t with some distress. ‘What happened?’ she asked. ‘I don’t understand.’

Taffy came forward and linked her arm with Hermione’s, leading her toward the sitting room in the wake of Elinore and Vi. ‘Reg said something tactless,’ she said baldly. ‘I honestly don’t know how he manages in his job—he’s the most awkward git I’ve ever known!’

Hermione blinked at t’s vehement tone. Taffy was usually the most accepting girl imaginable. ‘Do you think Kell’s happy that her training is over?’ she asked hesitantly.

Taffy looked into Hermione’s eyes, a frown marring her smooth forehead. ‘I hope so,’ she said fervently.

That night, Hermione was very happy to curl up with her journal. As ever, she hoped to have a new message from her Master, but at the least, she could pour the evening’s events out to him and ask what it all meant.

She was delighted to see that she was in luck tonight, for her professor’s inimitable handwriting scrawled over the page when she opened the green leather tome.

Little one,

As you may imagine, the news you asked me to pass on was well received. I will not attempt to convey all the words spoken by the recipient, but you may tell our mutual friend that the intelligence was received with great gladness. No doubt further communication will be forthcoming; ask her to be patient.

I would urge you to involve yourself in amusing our mutual friend and looking out for her well-being. It is probable that her spirits will require some support during this time, and it will help to occupy your nurturing instincts, in the absence of your two former charges. Kindly continue to report upon her condition, so that I might satisfy the rapacious curiosity of her husband.

I am pleased to hear that your studies continue apace. I have lately heard from your erstwhile classmates that a most promising lead has surfaced. Even I am not unhopeful of a positive outcome of their current quest.

In more personal matters, I agree that it would be prudent for you to visit your parents’ home to apprise them of your situation. I urge you to prevail upon them to permit you to remain in residence at Roissy House. It is the safest possible place for you to be, and I’m sure if you convey that information to them, they will not insist upon your removal to their home.

Lastly, I assure you that our current circumstances are as unpalatable to me as they are to you. I will continue to manage my affairs with the care which has allowed me to live to this old age (yes, that was intended to make you smile), and in return, I must insist that you safeguard yourself with all the attention to detail that my absence prevents me from exercising on your behalf. Guard with all the cunning at your command that which is most precious to me, and I will return the favour.
Hermione sat with a fatuous smile on her face, her fingertip tracing the outline of the letters he had penned. Had he truly unbent enough to make a joke? Was she really ‘that which is most precious’ to him? Did he love her as she loved him? Why did he not say so?

Uncapping her bottle of ink, she began to record the day’s happenings, all the while rolling his words about in her mind like fine wine upon the tongue, breathing the bouquet of his care and concern.

After a quick visit to her parents the next day, she made a side trip to Diagon Alley. It was hard to believe that she had hated ‘Miss Smith’ for so long, believing her to be Professor Snape’s village squeeze, and now she was willingly participating in coddling the wench. Grinning, she walked along the mostly deserted street of the wizarding shopping district, stepping into Fortescue’s. She asked for a box of frozen chocolate coated sweets for her pregnant friend—not that Hermione would mind eating a few of them, as well. The proprietor took her gold and handed over the box. Hermione returned her coin purse to her cloak pocket and walked out again into the pale sunlight.

‘Look who it is,’ a snarling voice said, and too late, all of Hermione’s alarm bells went off.

She turned, the box of frozen confections tucked under her arm, and trained her wand on the figure of Simon Curtis, lately of the Sussex D/s community.

‘Too good to say “hello”?’ Simon taunted. ‘You weren’t so shy with a big audience.’

His face was twisted in an unpleasant expression, his wand hand fisted in the pocket of his cloak.

‘Step aside and let me pass,’ Hermione said steadily, her wand unwavering.

‘Where’s your big, ugly Master?’ Simon asked, making a show of glancing about. ‘Did he let you out all on your own?’ He took a menacing step towards her, his voice low, his foul breath causing her nostrils to flare in distaste. ‘Between the two of you, you got my privileges revoked.’

Hermione backed up a step. ‘You’re the only one responsible for having your privileges revoked,’ she answered levelly. Her mind was whirling. Even now, in the middle of the day, Simon's breath reeked of drink, and the street was too quiet for her to trust that a bystander might interrupt their unwelcome tête-à-tête. Was she steady enough to Disapparate without splinching?

‘Looks like the Mudblood has an admirer,’ a familiar voice chortled from the side, and Hermione’s attention was drawn from Simon to Vincent Crabbe, who stood in the middle of the road like a misplaced gargoyle.

Draco Malfoy walked up to stand next to Crabbe, his face, like that of an avenging angel, a stark contrast to his companion’s. Cold grey eyes swept over Hermione and Simon before he spoke in a
bored, drawling voice.

‘He doesn’t look admiring to me,’ he said. ‘He looks disgusted, as he ought.’ Malfoy turned to Crabbe. ‘Why don’t you buy our friend a pint?’ He inclined his white-blond head toward the Leaky Cauldron.

Hermione frowned in confusion. What was Malfoy up to?

Crabbe suffered from no such disadvantage; he never questioned Malfoy’s orders. Stepping up to Simon Curtis, Crabbe took him by the arm and frog-marched him away. Simon recognised he was out-manned, but he did not leave without a parting shot at Hermione.

‘This isn’t over!’ he bellowed at her over his shoulder as Crabbe dragged him away. ‘I’ll get my own back!’

Hermione turned to face Malfoy, her heart still beating erratically in her chest. ‘What are you doing?’ she demanded shrilly.

Malfoy shifted his weight from one leg to the other, continuing to look bored, and stared pointedly at her wand, which was now trained on him. Hermione looked down and realised she hadn’t put her weapon away—but Harry would never face Malfoy unarmed, would he? Still, she lowered her wand, and she thought Malfoy looked slightly relieved.

‘Why did you do that?’ she repeated, darting a nervous look up and down Diagon Alley and seeing that she and Malfoy were the only people in sight.

‘Why are you still here?’ Malfoy responded flatly.

Hermione gritted her teeth in frustration, but she recognised a reprieve when she saw one. Malfoy had his own reasons for doing what he had done, and Hermione might never know what those reasons were—but for now, she had best go home and be glad of the help she had received, however doubtful she was of the provenance.

‘Right,’ she muttered, and turning on the spot, she was gone.

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Hermione went straight to Hadrian when she arrived at Roissy House. He seated her in a leather wingback chair in the Dominant’s Study and pushed a glass of cognac into her hands, murmuring calming nonsense until she swallowed it. On any other day, Hermione might have enjoyed looking around the dark, masculine room, with its leather chairs and lingering aroma of expensive cigars. Just now, however, she was too rattled to pay much mind to her surroundings. Claudius hurried into the room as she was draining the last bit of the warm liquid from the heavy crystal goblet, and she set the glass aside and told the story to the two Dominants, who stood over her with frowns on their faces.

‘Reg and I will go to the Leaky Cauldron,’ Claudius assured Hadrian, when Hermione had answered all their questions.

‘And I’ll owl Master Thorne in Sussex, just to keep him current,’ Hadrian said, moving over to the heavy mahogany desk in the corner and taking up a quill.
‘But what will I do?’ Hermione said, feeling aggravated.

Hadrian looked up at her with sober blue eyes. ‘You’ll go upstairs immediately and write in your journal,’ he said with finality. ‘Tell Severus what happened.’

But she didn’t—not straightaway. She went along to Taffy’s rooms with the box of frozen treats, and the two girls ate the ice cream and discussed the incident in depth.

‘So, Draco Malfoy sent Simon off with one of his friends?’ Taffy asked.

‘Yes,’ Hermione answered. ‘And both of their fathers are Death Eaters. For all I know, Draco and Crabbe might be Death Eaters, too. I just don’t know what it means.’

Taffy picked up another chocolate covered bon bon and bit into it. ‘Maybe Simon’s a Death Eater too,’ she suggested.

Hermione frowned. ‘No, Severus and Rafe would know him if he were,’ she pointed out.

Taffy laughed at herself. ‘I’m not cut out for intrigue,’ she said. ‘I’ll leave the skulduggery to you, Hermione—you’re so clever!’

Hermione looked up sharply, expecting satire, but Taffy was looking at her with wide, sincere eyes. She meant what she said.

‘Thanks,’ Hermione said, rising to her feet. ‘Hadrian told me to write to Severus immediately, and I haven’t done it yet, so I’d best get to it.’

Taffy sat forward a bit, reaching out to touch Hermione tentatively on the arm. ‘I’ve noticed that you’ve begun referring to him by his name,’ she said gently. ‘I take it he gave you permission?’

Hermione smiled brightly. ‘Not in so many words,’ she admitted, ‘but I said it, and he ordered me to repeat it and kissed me, so I am taking that as permission.’

Taffy matched her smile. ‘I think I would, too,’ she said. ‘Now, go write to him—you don’t want him to hear the news from someone else, first.’

Hermione blanched at the very thought. ‘Oh, no, I don’t!’ she agreed and hurried down to her room.

The journal lay upon her bedside table, and she settled cross-legged on the bed with a quill, ready to record the events of the day. She flipped through to the next empty page, and her heart turned over at the sight of his slashing script.

He already knew—and he wasn’t happy.
Hermione frowned down at the scrawl of her professor’s handwriting in her journal, a squirming sensation of wrong-doing crawling in her belly. Feeling slightly sick, she read his comments.

_Hermione,_

It astounds me that I received report of your stupid, thoughtless pleasure excursion to Diagon Alley from a source other than your report in this journal. I was under the impression that you were committed to partnership in this endeavour—that it was your intention to be a source of comfort and satisfaction to me, rather than one of frustration, annoyance, and irritation. I see that I was mistaken.

By what stretch of so-called logic could you excuse a detour to Diagon Alley as safeguarding yourself? Will it be necessary for me to require you to never step out the door without an escort? Respond to me _instantly_ with an explanation of this inexcusable lapse in judgment. The clock is ticking.

SS

Hermione put the journal away from her angrily. It was so unfair! He had told her to look after Taffy, hadn’t he? And he had never told her _not_ to go to Diagon Alley! How was she supposed to read his mind?

Still, he was obviously concerned for her. Didn’t he frequently mask his caring with some expression of aggravation? She opened her bottle of ink and took up her quill, frowning. Why did it feel as if she spent half her time placating him?

She wrote a complete report of her day, including her visit with her parents, their acquiescence to her plans to ‘stay with friends’ while revising for her NEWTs, and the meeting with Simon in Diagon Alley. She wrote clearly and concisely with no emotion evident in her account. When she had finished writing, she set the journal aside, leaving it open to watch for her Master’s reply, and took up a book to read.

It was a terrible struggle to concentrate on Ancient Runes when she was distressed about Severus, so she was relieved when his spiky writing began to appear on the page of her journal.

_little one,_

Your account was very thorough, and I am pleased to say that it is consistent with the report I received from a former classmate of yours. No, I did not hear from Hadrian; it would not occur to him that you would not immediately apprise me of the happenings in Diagon Alley. I heard of the
encounter from your ‘saviour’, however unlikely a one he might be. You may, in future encounters, feel confident that he means you and your friends no harm, though the same cannot be said for his associates. It is, moreover, imperative that you continue to publicly demonstrate your usual disdain for and distrust of him, so that his usefulness may continue.

As for your desire to be of use to t, that is a laudable aim. I have no fault to find with that desire. My concern is with your inadvisable impulse to put yourself in the way of danger. Think before you act! This is no game, and there are no second chances in war. Remain within the walls of Roissy House, and if you must leave the house, carefully consider every possible consequence of your decision to leave its sanctuary and be prepared for any eventuality.

Although I acquit you of defiance, I cannot allow the incident to pass unpunished. The purpose of your punishment is to bring home to you how very serious your error in judgment was and how dangerous it would be for you to repeat such behaviour. Therefore, you will not be allowed to climax for the next three days. Each night when you go to bed, you will follow these directions:

(1) Strip naked (2) Remove your anal plugs from the box on the top shelf of the wardrobe (3) Take the smallest plug and lubricate it well (4) Kneel in the middle of the bed and lubricate your arsehole, pushing gently inside with your fingertip and spreading a generous amount of lubricant (5) Insert the plug into your arse (6) Remain on your knees and stimulate your nipples for five full minutes, pinching, twisting, and pulling until your cunt is wet (7) Put your fingers on your clit and rub it until you are on the cusp of orgasm (8) Take your hand away from your cunt and remain still until the urge to climax has passed (9) Repeat steps 6 through 8 until one hour has passed (10) Remove the plug, take it to the bathroom sink, and wash it thoroughly before putting it away (11) Record the entire process in your journal, including the number of times you masturbated to the edge of orgasm without coming.

On the fourth night, you will receive new instructions. I have full confidence that you will obey me in this, as you have done in all things, my pet. If you like, when you are rubbing your hot little clit, you may imagine how rigid my cock will grow as I read your report, and how hard I will come for you when I wank to images of you with my plug in your arse.

Your Master,

SS

Hermione read his answer with wildly fluctuating emotions. She was pleased at his use of ‘little one’, happy that he responded positively to her account of the day, intrigued at the insinuation that she was to trust Malfoy, and simultaneously repelled and aroused at his instructions for her punishment.

She picked up her quill, wrote a quick reply, promising obedience, and went into the bathroom to wash her hands and face before dressing for dinner.

She was seated next to Kell at the table, and over their soup, as the others discussed other things, Hermione quietly asked about the process for Claudius to find a Master for Kell.

‘He actually sends out letters to Doms he knows, who are either without submissives, or who are members of a community other than ours, where there might be single Doms,’ Kell said, her eyes darting to Reg’s empty chair before coming to rest on her untouched soup.
‘Do you have someone in mind?’ Hermione asked her curiously. ‘Will he let you pick someone?’

Kell took up her spoon and dipped it into the rich broth her bowl. ‘I will have a say in choosing,’ she answered. ‘And if I have met someone or know someone I think is a likely candidate, I can ask to have that person contacted.’

Hermione considered this. ‘Did you put in any requests?’

Kell turned to look at Hermione, her expression strangely flat. ‘No,’ Kell said. ‘I haven’t met anyone in particular whom I fancy.’

Hermione felt a stab of something dangerously close to pity. ‘You will,’ she said with forced conviction. ‘You’ll meet someone amazing.’

Kell’s lips twitched into a strained smile. ‘Yeah,’ she said, taking a sip of soup. ‘Yeah, I will.’

After dinner, Hermione excused herself and spent two hours with the Ancient Runes book. Doggedly, she fought through translating two spells. The first was a simple charm to purify water; the second was a rather more complex Healing Charm. Though she had no dirty water to cleanse, she went into the bathroom and cast a strong *Lumos*. The very light break-out of acne on her forehead, a common precursor to her period, greeted her from the mirror. She frowned and raised her wand, duplicating the wand movements described in the book and speaking the incantation.

A sensation, first cold, then hot, touched her skin, and the unsightly pimples faded to near invisibility.

‘Not bad,’ she muttered, tracing her fingers over her forehead. ‘I’ll have to remember that one.’

Satisfied that her translation had been correct, she returned to her room and put away the book, a flutter of excitement in her tummy as she thought about what she would do next. It wasn’t nearly as thrilling as being *with* him, but doing something at his command was always arousing, even if it was something very simple.

Kneeling on their bed with the lubricated plug in her hand, she stared at it, thinking it was too big to fit. Still, she knew that thinking about it too long would be a mistake, so she bent forward, bracing herself on one hand, and reached behind her to insert the plug. Immediately she felt the resistance of the muscles, the sensation that what she was attempting was unnatural. She took a deep breath and continued to push. The plastic device was in her body now, even if only minimally, and the sphincter muscles were burning. She paused, breathing deeply, imagining how pleased her Master would be at this obedience—she had to think of him, because if she thought about herself, she would never complete this task. After a while, she began pushing again, painfully aware of the widening of the plug, stretching her sphincter muscles ever wider—oh, *surely* this wasn’t really considered to be a pleasurable experience! It felt wrong; she had a strong urge to push, as if she were having a bowel movement, to expel the foreign object. Again, she stopped, taking deep, slow breaths, thinking how much easier this would be if *he* were here, inserting the plug, speaking to her constantly in his silky baritone, the very sound of his velvety voice compelling her to obedience with the promise of pleasure to come.

Thinking of him as if he were here, watching her, brought a thrum of want to her quim, and she bravely pushed the plug farther in, breathing in deeply. She stretched and stretched and suddenly, she felt the widest bit of the plug move past the ring of muscles, and the rest of the plug was *in*, the flange resting against the soft cheeks of her bottom. Hermione sucked in a great breath, relieved to
have persevered and accomplished her goal. She remained as she was, bottom in the air, shoulders on the counterpane, until she thought she might be able to rise again to her knees. She worried that the plug would fall out, but she was relieved to note that it did not. She noticed that her knees were protesting the prolonged contact with the slightly rough weave of the bedspread, and she wished she had thought to kneel on the sheets, instead. Still, she had accomplished only a part of her assignment; there was more torment to come.

She glanced at the clock, seeing that it was ten. She had to masturbate for an hour without coming. There was no point in feeling sorry for herself now; the only way out of this situation was to follow instructions and get it done. She had accepted the beautiful black collar about her throat, knowing that she would be required to do things she did not like. The only question for her to answer was whether or not she trusted him. If she trusted him, then she knew that there was something in this exercise of benefit to her, whether she could see it now or not.

Kneeling up, feeling an unnatural fullness in her rectum, she began to stimulate her nipples. She squeezed her breasts, then grasped her nipples, pulling on them as he would do, pinching and twisting. The nipple stimulation seemed somehow to draw her attention more to her filled bum, spreading a confusing sensation from her breasts to her arsehole … and oh yes, her cunt felt it, as well. After less than two minutes of plucking at her nipples, she desperately wanted to touch her clit, for it ached and burned. She pinched her nipples, holding them firmly between her fingertips, imagining her Master fastening her nipple clips to them, and she laughed softly. When he had first clamped her, she had thought it was terrible, and now, she wanted her clamps, for she knew they would somehow compound the sensations she was experiencing now, making her hotter and wetter and more in need of her Master’s cock.

Thinking of him, of his erect shaft, brought a moan from her throat, and she was pleased to see her five minutes of nipple rubbing were up, and she could finger her clitoris. She licked her fingers, knowing she didn’t need to, that she was already slick, but having her fingers in her mouth made her think of having his ridged penis there, of swirling her tongue over it, tasting his salty arousal, and she whimpered, even as the tips of her fingers touched her aching centre, sending her careening towards orgasm.

Horrified, she took her hand away, clamping her thighs together, hoping to fend off the threatened climax. She breathed raggedly, forcing herself to relax, to calm, and she bit her lip in frustration, her hands fisted on her thighs. That had been a close call. Sweet Nimüe but she wanted to come! She had completely forgotten about the foreign object in her arse, but she thought about it now, feeling its anomalous presence in her body, keenly aware of its wrongness.

After another minute or two, she touched herself again, and almost immediately her body hummed with arousal. She dipped her fingers into the pool of liquid at her opening and spread it up, three fingers lightly applying pressure to her clitoris as her other hand trailed up her ribcage to her breast, lightly pinching. She rubbed a circular motion against her slick nub, feeling the way the fullness in her bum accentuated her pleasure. Her hand trailed to the other breast, then quickly from erect nipple to erect nipple, back and forth, causing her to breathe faster and faster. One more good rub of her clitoris would bring her off so nicely, intensely—but she wasn’t to do it, was not allowed to come—and with a terrific exercise of will, she moved her hands again to the tops of her thighs and held off, teeth gritted.

Dear Merlin this was difficult! She opened her eyes and looked at the clock, seeing that only a quarter-hour had passed—she had another forty-five minutes to persevere through this exercise before she would be finished!
Torn between dissatisfaction and desire, she swallowed and started again, knowing fingers coaxing her slowly along the road to orgasm, her mind cognizant of what her clitoris could not imagine—that she would refuse herself satisfaction over and over again, as a show of obedience to her absent Master, her tightly stretched nerve endings lured repeatedly to the edge, only to be left in their jangling state for three long days.

Fuck a duck.

On the morning of the fourth day, Hermione was happy to wake up to find her professor’s spiky scrawl on the first empty page of her journal.

little one,

I am very pleased by your completion of your assignment, including detailed written accounts. I will be supplying you with further instructions for today’s well-earned orgasm, so remain close to your room and check this journal frequently.

You have done well and will be rewarded.

No, there are no details with which I can provide you regarding my current activities, though you may rest assured that I read each of the entries detailing your adventures in private, with predictable results.

Your Master,

SS

Hermione hugged the journal to her chest with a self-satisfied smirk worthy of even her Master. The notion of his arousal in response to her writing—and the accompanying predictable results—filled her with glee.

She put aside the journal and went to bathe, noting how her body reacted to the touch of her hands upon her own flesh. She was like a pistol primed to shoot, simply waiting for her Master’s finger upon her trigger, even if his finger would be represented by her own, today.

After breakfast, she hurried to her room to check her journal, but he had not yet written to her. Disappointed, she called Pitty to request a lunch tray in her room, giving as her excuse her revising, and she settled down to continue puzzling her way through the last spell in the Ancient Runes text. She had been working on it all of the two previous days, but had thus far been unable to translate the runic script into understandable words.

She kept her journal open on the table which served as her makeshift desk, glancing at it frequently even as she worked on her translation. At mid-day, Pitty brought chicken pie, and Hermione ate it almost absently, with one eye on her journal and her mind taken up with the mystery of the ancient text.
But at four o’clock, she pushed away from the table, a piece of parchment covered with her handwriting clutched in her fingers. She pulled her wand and swished and flicked as she read what she had written, murmuring strange, unintelligible words as she went. She repeated the exercise four times, then stood, ready to give it a try. The spell which had taken so long to translate was supposed to rejuvenate a dead organism. Hermione was repelled by the idea of trying to reanimate a dead animal, but she had no problem with trying the spell on the sadly wilted houseplant on the table by the door. Pitty had placed it there after Professor Snape had departed, perhaps hoping to cheer Hermione, but Hermione had been unable to take any pleasure from it, to the point that she had failed to water it. Now the philodendron was wilted and limp, and in her opinion, the perfect subject for her experiment.

With the spell firmly fixed in her mind, Hermione traced the wand motions through the air, focussing on the houseplant with intent, the unfamiliar words of the incantation ringing through the silent room. With the final slash of her wand, red light shot towards the browning philodendron, and before the magic light had faded from her eyes, the plant was lush and green, the picture of houseplant health.

‘How odd!’ she murmured, stepping forward to rub a shining green leaf between her finger and thumb. ‘Well, at least I know I translated it properly.’

Satisfied, she turned to tidy her work table, noting that the last page of the journal remained stubbornly blank. She had just recapped her ink bottle when a commotion outside her window drew her attention, and she hurried to open up to the tiny owl fluttering there.

‘Pigwidgeon!’ she cried, allowing the creature into her room.

Pigwidgeon hooted in a friendly manner, looking quite proud to have successfully found her. Hermione carried him to the table, where the remains of her roast beef sandwich lay upon a plate, and she gave the meat to the bird as she sat down to read the note, scrawled in Harry’s untidy hand.

_Hermione,_

_We’ve got something for you, and we need for you to have it as soon as possible. I hope your studies have been successful, because we need something translated as soon as possible. We can’t come to you, but we’re waiting for you in a secure location. Remember where we went the summer before fourth year—the place where we slept on that trip? You’ll find us there. Please come as quickly as possible._

_Love,_

_H & R_

Hermione whirled away before the love from her two best friends had penetrated her brain. She began pulling on her sturdy boots, her cloak, and her thick gloves. She knew precisely where Harry and Ron were. They were waiting for her in the woods near where the Quidditch World Cup had been held that summer, where the Death Eaters had shown themselves en masse for the first time since the night Harry’s parents had died.
Hermione wrote a quick note in case someone came looking for her before she was able to return, and she left it prominently displayed in the middle of her work table. Checking to make sure her wand was in her pocket, she turned on the spot and Disapparated.

She did not see the spiky script of her Master as it began to materialise in her journal.

She arrived in the swiftly darkening wood with her wand in her hand, ready to defend herself. No one was there, she was quick to note, and she began to move through the murk beneath the trees, her ears straining for any sound.

‘Hermione!’

Harry and Ron appeared as if from nowhere, tucking the Invisibility Cloak out of sight as they advanced on her. They exchanged quick hugs, and she was comforted by their familiar scents. Their faces were thin, they both needed a shave and a good bath, but their grins were as they had ever been, and she was filled with a rush of affection for them.

‘I’ve been so worried,’ she told them.

‘We hated to have to leave you,’ Harry assured her. ‘We’d have come looking for you if Snape hadn’t promised he had you hidden somewhere safe.’

Ron shook his head. ‘Who would’ve ever thought the git would be useful? But he’s helped quite a bit, actually.’ He sounded almost regretful.

‘Where are you staying, Hermione?’ Harry asked, his dear face open and affectionate, his green eyes without guile.

‘It’s Secret-Kept,’ she told him. ‘I’m unable to tell you.’

He nodded gravely. ‘That’s good—safer for you. Are they Order people?’

Hermione shook her head. ‘It’s no one you know, but they’re very kind to me. I just wish you were somewhere as nice.’ She took his hand and squeezed it, distressed.

‘We’re doing all right,’ he assured her. ‘We manage.’

Ron didn’t speak in support or refutation of this statement; his eyes moved constantly about the clearing where they stood, alert for the presence of others. Harry seemed to take note of this and settled down to business.

‘We found the book Snape told us to look for,’ he said, producing a small book from his cloak pocket.

Hermione reached for it, feeling the power of the object before her fingers touched it. The leather binding was supple in her hands, but when she opened to a page in the middle of the book, she found the writing to be faded and difficult to discern, though she recognised the pattern of the Elder Futhark runic characters. ‘It’s going to be hard to read it,’ she said, ‘but I’ll give it everything I’ve got.’ She slipped the book into her own pocket. ‘What am I looking for, exactly?’
Ron answered her. ‘It’s a counter-spell for the one that Wormtail used to revive Voldemort,’ he said grimly, and Hermione looked at him with admiration. She had never heard Ron pronounce the Dark Lord’s name so fearlessly before. He noticed her look, and he shrugged. ‘Living on the run kind of puts things in perspective,’ he said grimly.

Impulsively, Hermione reached out her arms to her best friends, pride of their handling of the situation and fear for their futures flooding her simultaneously. The boys stepped into the group hug, and they held one another for a long moment, their arms about one another and their heads together, the only sound their breathing … Until a harsh voice broke the twilit silence.

‘How touching,’ Severus Snape snarled, and Hermione and the boys broke guiltily apart, as if they had been caught in wrong-doing, each of them looking warily into the enraged face of their erstwhile Potions master.
Chapter 55: Accepting the Inevitable

For the Potions Master’s Amusement

Chapter 55: Accepting the Inevitable

Hermione was the first to speak. ‘Hello, Professor,’ she said, her voice slightly shaky. She glanced at Harry and Ron, but the boys looked simply annoyed, as if they expected no better from Snape.

Her Master advanced on them, ignoring Hermione’s greeting. ‘Is this your idea of safeguarding your friend, Potter?’ he demanded angrily. ‘What is the point of annoying me every time I have the misfortune to see you with questions about her location and her safety if you’re going to take the first opportunity to draw her into danger?’

Professor Snape was so angry he was spitting as he spoke, and Hermione was looking anxiously from him to Harry. Harry didn’t step back or give any show of fear or deference. He simply looked Snape in the eye, with Ron standing at his shoulder, wearing an identical look of bored patience.

After a moment of silence, during which Harry seemed to stress the fact that he paid no mind to the professor’s rant, Harry said, ‘We found the spell book. Hermione has it, now.’

Professor Snape sneered. ‘Then you have done all the damage you can do here, haven’t you?’ he inquired silkily. ‘You’d best be off so I can deliver Miss Granger to her lodgings.’

Ron stepped forward. ‘She doesn’t have to deal with your foul temper,’ he said aggressively. ‘Get back to your filthy mates, and we’ll look after Hermione.’

The professor shrugged eloquently. ‘It is of no consequence,’ he said dismissively. ‘Ask her whose company she would prefer.’ And he turned away, appearing indifferent.

Hermione was angry. He was so bloody impatient and rude with her friends, deliberately provoking them and then mocking them—how could she care so much for someone so cruel and spiteful?

But the simple truth was, she did care for him. He had never, in the time of their personal relationship, treated her with the callous unconcern he showed for her friends. She had known, even as she was falling for him, that he was not a nice man, but she couldn’t understand why he had to be so deliberately offensive, stirring others to anger.

And what kind of dark cloud hovered over her that she could pop out for a short visit with her friends, only to be caught at it by her Master?

Resolutely putting her questions aside, she turned to the boys, and standing on her tip-toes, she kissed each of them on the cheek. ‘It was brilliant to see you,’ she said. ‘Be careful, and let me know when I can help.’ She patted her pocket. ‘I’ll get to work on this straightaway,’ she promised.

Ron scowled. ‘You don’t mind going with him?’ he asked, nodding to the professor’s back.
‘No, I don’t mind,’ she said quietly.

Harry gave her another quick hug. ‘Write to me if you need me,’ he murmured into her ear.

Hermione nodded mutely, and the boys turned on the spot and Disapparated.

At the *pop* of their departure, the professor turned and strode to Hermione, his expression so forbidding that she backed away from him, until he had her trapped against the wide trunk of an ancient oak tree. He lowered his face until their noses almost touched, and he stared into her eyes, his own very nearly bleak in expression.

‘What am I going to do with you?’ he asked, raising one long-fingered hand to her face and stroking her cheek. ‘It is as if I must have you watched twenty-four hours a day to keep you out of trouble.’ He smoothed hair back from her face and studied her features as if to commit them to memory. ‘Can you not comprehend that your place is at Roissy House, contributing to the cause with your formidable intellectual powers?’ He kissed her temple, then her cheek, his five o’clock shadow rasping over her skin. His voice purred into her ear, and she shivered at the warmth of his breath. ‘Can you not understand that I cannot do what I must do if I am constantly worried about you?’

Hermione grasped his cloak in her fists, inhaling the scent of him, her heart racing. She had expected anger and denunciation and punishment, but his behaviour was far from those things.

‘I *want* to please you,’ she said, arching her neck to give him access to her throat, prompting him to lick and nip the pulse beating there. ‘But I have to help Harry, Severus—you know I do.’

His hand came up and spanned her throat as he raised his face and looked into her eyes. ‘He didn’t *need* you there,’ he said, his voice low and insistent. ‘I could just as easily have delivered the book to you, or it could have been sent by owl—he sent for you because he wanted to see you.’ His lips twisted. ‘You wanted to see him, too.’

Hermione rested her head against the trunk of the tree, excited by the hand at her throat, but even as her body thrummed with want of him, she recognised the question he would not ask. ‘You know my heart, my mind and my soul,’ she reminded him, her own hands rising to caress his gaunt face. ‘You know I love you,’ she added, her voice barely above a whisper.

He was upon her like a panther on its prey, his kiss so savage that he might have been attempting to devour her rather than simply ravish her. She melted beneath the assault, making no demur as he unfastened her cloak and then her jeans, his hand in her knickers, teasing her clitoris. She moaned into his mouth, a low, feral sound which acted upon him like a catalyst.

‘Filthy girl,’ he whispered, the tip of his rapier tongue tracing the shell of her ear. ‘You want to be fingered in the forest, don’t you? You hope someone can see us.’

‘No!’ she gasped, as ever, both aroused and mortified by his words.

‘Don’t lie to me, little slut,’ he advised, his unoccupied hand sliding beneath her jumper and under the elastic of her bra to knead her breast with cold fingers. ‘You love showing your cunt off—such a pretty little slit it is—and even more, you want people to watch when I kiss and finger and fuck you. You *crave* it, nasty little exhibitionist that you are.’

Hermione humped his hand, feeling the wild, careening climb to the pinnacle of her arousal stirring in her quim, building in her womb, making her crazy.
‘I think Potter and Weasley are still here,’ he taunted, pinching her nipple hard enough to draw an audible moan from her. ‘I think they’re hiding in the trees with their Omnioculars—they can see you with my hand in your knickers, smell your cunt, hear your moans—they’re hard, watching you rut like a bitch in heat.’

‘No!’ Hermione objected, feeling the fire running wild along her nerve endings, not wanting to imagine her two best friends aroused while watching her writhe beneath her professor’s hand but unable to disregard the erotic dream woven by her Master’s compelling voice.

‘Yes,’ he said with certainty. ‘They’re watching you—they know now what kind of nasty little girl you really are—so you may as well come for me, Hermione.’

He accompanied this command with more pressure on her clitoris, just enough to tip her over the edge, and as she unravelled beneath his hands, he covered her mouth with his, inhaling her cries as if they were the breath of life for him.

In a flash, he pulled her against him. She was dimly aware of the sensation of Apparition, and then they stood in their room at Roissy House. He undressed her with swift competence and repeated the process on himself. Hermione could not tear her eyes from his jutting erection, and he noted her fascination with narrowed eyes.

‘On your knees,’ he ordered her.

Hermione dropped gracefully, assuming the submissive’s pose, her emotions evening out as she settled into her comfort zone. She had been afraid he would punish her for going to Harry, but she realised now he knew she would go if Harry called for her—he acknowledged, however unwillingly, her commitment to Harry’s quest—and knowing this made her want more than ever to give him what he needed. Love for him swelled in her chest until it was a physical pain, and when he commanded her to look at him, she did so with no effort to hide her abject adoration.

He stared down into her face, and she felt the moment when he slipped into her mind. He quickly confirmed that she had indeed gone without orgasm during the nights of her punishment, then he reviewed her memory of the ill-fated excursion to Diagon Alley. Satisfied, he relaxed and stepped closer, maintaining eye contact, and put his hand to the back of her head, encouraging her to take him into her mouth. With a purr of happiness, Hermione knelt up and did just that, glorying in his groan of pleasure.

She placed the flats of her palms against his jutting hipbones and slid around to his bum cheeks, pulling him closer. For several minutes they remained in this posture, with him making leisurely thrusts into her mouth and her bobbing back and forth, maintaining constant suction, her tongue occasionally swirling over the crown of his cock.

‘My pet,’ he said, halting her movement by the simple expedient of tightening his hand in her hair.

‘Fetch your butt plug and bend over the bed.’

Hermione rose and did as he bade her, relinquishing the plug and the lubricant into his hands before she bent over the bed. What would he do? Would he hurt her? Would he try to fuck her in the arse? His cock was much thicker than the widest part of the plug she’d been wearing. She bit her lip and discreetly gripped fistfuls of the counterpane, hoping she could withstand whatever was coming.

‘Part your arse cheeks and show me your naughty little hole,’ he told her, and Hermione felt her face
flame crimson as she pulled her bottom cheeks wide, exposing her arsehole. ‘Good girl,’ he praised, and she squirmed with pleasure to hear such approbation from him. Then she felt the tip of the plug at the entrance to her bottom, and he spoke to her in a calm, commanding tone. ‘Yield to me, Hermione—accept the plug.’

Hermione closed her eyes. *Please let me be able to do this* she thought. ‘Yes, Master,’ she said aloud and did her best to relax.

Deft and certain, he exerted presume, steady and sure, and to Hermione’s surprise, the plug slid home, the flared base snug against her bottom.

‘Good girl,’ he repeated, his tone very pleased. ‘I had feared you would resist me in this, pet, but you’ve been very accepting and obedient. I think you deserve a special treat.’

‘Th-thank you, Master,’ Hermione said, wondering if she would actually think whatever he had in mind was a treat. What would it be?

‘Hands on the bed,’ he said, and she released her bottom cheeks, reaching instead along the textured bedding.

‘Beautiful,’ he murmured, and then the sting of his hand upon her bottom burned through to her quim at the same time she heard the *smack* of the impact.

Hermione shuddered at the sensation. It had been so long since he had simply spanked her by hand, and the plug in her arse added a new dimension to the sensation, somehow heightening her pleasure, despite the vague discomfort. Still, she had to admit that she had grown more accustomed to the feeling of it, even in just the four days of using the plug regularly.

He spanked her hard, careful not to directly hit the plug itself, but otherwise spreading his attentions liberally about her bum and upper thighs, occasionally landing a glancing blow to her quim. Before long, Hermione felt her resistance to the pain dissolving, and she fully succumbed to it, allowing her tears to fall, feeling the shame of her poor choices, which had caused her Master concern and distress. He looked after her so thoroughly, made plans for her, worried over her daily, and she was constantly disappointing him, being thoughtless and impulsive, disregarding his careful plans for her safety and rushing into potentially dangerous situations. How could he ever begin to forgive her lack of consideration?

Then he was bent over her, lifting her feet to stand upon a low box, and he fitted himself perfectly along her back, his mouth at her ear even as his hand again found her wet cunt.

‘You need this from me, don’t you, pet?’ he said, rubbing her clitoris in a circular motion with the tips on his two longest fingers, the silken rod of his cock hard against her backside. ‘You need me to discipline you and bring you to the proper frame of mind for a good little submissive, don’t you?’

‘Y-yes,’ Hermione sobbed, trying to turn to put her arms around him, but he held her in place.

‘Bend over like a good slut,’ he growled. ‘I’m going to fuck your cunt.’

Hermione bent, bracing her arms on the mattress, and he positioned himself at her entrance, pressing against her opening and guiding himself inside her, moving slowly until he was properly situated. She gasped at his first full thrust, finding this position allowed him particularly deep penetration. His hands slid up to grasp her breasts, and he squeezed them rhythmically as he fucked her with grunting
exhalations each time his heavy scrotum impacted her labia. Hermione was lost in the moment, completely given over to the sensations he created in her body, his considerable cock ploughing the furrow of her quim, his bollocks slapping against her naked nether lips, the plug in her arse moving in a way which amplified it all.

Then he pulled out of her. ‘Climb up into the middle of the bed and lie down on your back,’ he commanded.

Hermione crawled to the middle of the bed and settled on her back, slightly worried about having his weight on top of her with the plug in her bum. But she didn’t have long to worry, for he kneel between her thighs, hooking his arms beneath her legs, and pushed inside her again, pressing her legs forward, the backs of the her thighs resting on his upper arms as he began to fuck her again. The position opened her wide, and she was soon moaning loudly from the incredible sensation of being filled from the back by his plug and from the front by his thick, glistening cock. Bereft of coherent speech, she stared up into his face. His glittering black eyes stared down at her, flicking from her bouncing breasts to her tear-streaked face. His hair hung in lank, oily strands about his too-thin face, an expression of fierce concentration settled in the crease between his black brows, his lips pulled back from his yellow teeth. He was not particularly prepossessing, but he was powerful and so fucking Dominant—Hermione could not imagine ever finding another man so striking as the one buried to his bollocks in her cunt.

She reached out for him with her mind, unable to express any coherent thought, but so brimful of emotion that she wanted to bathe him in it. He seemed, for once, to welcome her into his mind, though he made no effort to speak to her, but he allowed her to feel the emotion rolling through him like the sea at high tide. She gasped Severus! as it poured over her, colliding at this joining of their spirits with the mounting crescendo of her passion. Then they were coming together, their eyes wide as they climaxed, the concatenation of their shared sensations bouncing between them until he allowed her legs to fall to the bed, and he fell as well, lying beside her on the mattress.

Love, she managed to think, rolling into his waiting arms.

Yes, he acknowledged, though whether he was accepting the pet name or the expressed emotion, Hermione could not have said, for she was sliding into exhausted sleep.

Scarcely an hour had passed before he woke her, his lips warm on hers.

‘I have to leave,’ he said into her hair, holding her body against his.

‘So soon?’ she asked, clinging.

‘I’m supposed to be elsewhere,’ he told her. ‘But I very much wanted to be here for the end of your punishment, to give you the orgasm you had earned.’

Hermione pushed herself up onto her elbow, looking down into his face. ‘That’s why you told me to watch the journal—you wanted me to be in our room when you arrived.’

‘Yes,’ he answered, one hand idly stroking her arm.

‘I’m sorry I wasn’t here,’ she said in a small voice.
‘I am learning to expect the unexpected where you are concerned, pet,’ he said, his tone amused.

‘You’re not going to punish me for meeting with Harry and Ron?’ she asked. She hated to bring it up, but she had to know.

He looked grave. ‘I considered it,’ he said. ‘However, to be fair, I understand why you went; I hold Potter at fault for luring you into danger.’ He sat up, swinging his feet onto the floor, and stood to stretch. He retrieved his clothing from the floor and pulled it on before turning to speak to her again. He walked to stand at the edge of the bed, and Hermione knelt on the mattress and wrapped her arms around him.

He embraced her, then stepped back and tilted her chin until their eyes met. ‘I expect you to stay here and be safe,’ he told her sternly. ‘You may record the results of your study in the journal, and I will convey it to Potter. There is no need for you to venture out again to meet your friends.’

Hermione nodded and asked, ‘Can you come again soon to see me?’

He frowned and donned his cloak, fastening it at his throat. ‘This visit was ill-advised, at best. It is highly unlikely that we will meet again soon.’ His face contorted, and he kissed her mouth, as if he could convey words of heavy import by the pressure of his lips on hers. He released her mouth and bent to press a chaste kiss to each breast, then stepped back. ‘Be a good girl,’ he exhorted.

‘I promise,’ she said, meaning it.

And in swirl of black wool he was gone, leaving her naked in the rumpled bedclothes which smelled of sex—and his aftershave. Hermione lifted his pillow, still indented with the shape of his head, and buried her face in it, rocking back and forth, back and forth.
Chapter 56: Historical Gifts

For the Potions Master’s Amusement

Chapter 56: Historical Gifts

February blew in as a chill, nasty month, fraught with unrelenting mists and frequent sleet storms. Hermione huddled in her room, wearing her warmest clothes, wrapped in a thick blanket, and poring over the book Harry had given her. She worried at her lower lip until it was sore and chapped; she concentrated until her head and neck ached. She missed so many meals that Hadrian himself intervened.

‘Hermione,’ he said, standing over her with an expression of sincere concern in his eyes, ‘I understand that Master Severus has left you with an important assignment, but I am very sure he would not wish for you to neglect your health to complete it.’

Hermione averted her eyes, twining a hank of bushy hair about her fingers. She was quite sure her professor would never have permitted her to get away with skipping meals. But if she were to go down to dinner, she would have to bathe and put on something nice, and she would really rather be alone. She didn’t feel sociable. She didn’t want to make small talk and be polite. She wanted to sort out this book, because thus far, she had made very little progress. And then later tonight, if she were lucky, her Master would leave a special entry for her in her journal and give her a pleasure assignment …

‘Hermione.’

She easily recognised the warning tone, and her gaze returned compliantly to Hadrian’s face. She had forgotten how very much he could remind her of her Master. His eyes were now stern and uncompromising, and Hermione sat a little straighter, as if in response to an unspoken command.

‘I apologise, Hadrian,’ she said politely. ‘I was just thinking that if I were to come down to dinner, I would have to bathe and dress, and I would be late. I wouldn’t want to inconvenience everyone.’

His gaze flicked to the clock on the mantelpiece. ‘Dinner will be delayed three-quarters of an hour,’ he said. ‘We will see you downstairs then.’

And turning on his heel, Hadrian left the room, without waiting for Hermione to answer him.

‘Fuck a duck,’ Hermione muttered, standing and allowing the blanket to fall to the floor. She kicked it to one side and began tugging her jumper over her head as she trudged to the bathroom.

‘Can Pitty help Miss?’ a squeaky voice asked.

Hermione gasped and whirled, her arms caught in her bulky sweater. ‘Don’t do that!’ she gasped, yanking the offending garment over her head, static electricity causing her wild hair to crackle and snap about her head like a snake-haired Medusa.
The house-elf looked abashed. ‘Pitty is sorry, Miss,’ she said miserably. ‘Master Hadrian is telling Pitty to help Miss get ready quick!’

Hermione felt ashamed. ‘I apologize for snapping, Pitty,’ she said. ‘Thank you for your help. Could you lay out my evening clothes? And after I bathe, you can help me with my hair.’

Pitty scurried off to pull Hermione’s bronze evening dress from the wardrobe, and Hermione stripped out of the rest of her clothes, muttering darkly about bossy Dominants.

Bathed, coiffed, lightly made-up, and wearing pretty clothes, Hermione actually did feel better as she sat down to dinner. Taffy was looking pink-cheeked and happy, full of her progress on learning to knit baby clothes. Vi and Elinore had advice to impart on techniques for magical knitting, and Hadrian and Claudius were discussing the political climate of wizarding Britain in hushed tones. Kell sat with her cheek propped on one hand, dabbling in her soup. Reg’s place was empty; in fact, Hermione couldn’t remember the last time she’d seen him.

‘Where’s Reg?’ she asked, taking a delicious mouthful of French onion soup.

Vi glanced over from her discussion of the best gauge of knitting needle for knitting booties. ‘Reg is visiting with friends in Wiltshire,’ she said before returning to the knitting conversation.

Kell sat up and scowled. ‘With some bint, more like,’ she muttered.

‘Is Reg seeing someone?’ Hermione asked quietly.

Kell shrugged and pushed her bowl away. ‘Dunno,’ she admitted. ‘But we haven’t seen him around here in a couple of weeks—not for any longer than it takes to pick up clean clothes.’

Hermione considered this for a moment. ‘But surely he’ll be here this weekend,’ she said reasonably. ‘It’s a party weekend, after all.’

Kell nodded morosely. ‘I have three interviews with Dominants this weekend.’

Hermione reached over and squeezed Kell’s hand. ‘Three!’ she said. ‘Isn’t that exciting?’ She tried to imagine what it would be like to be a submissive in search of a Dominant. ‘Have you met any of them before?’

Kell shook her head. ‘They’re from different areas,’ she explained. Her chin came up. ‘Master Claudius has an excellent reputation for training proper submissives, so lots of Doms are interested in me.’

Hermione wished Kell sounded happier about it. ‘Surely everything isn’t decided over one interview?’ she asked delicately.

‘Oh, no,’ Kell agreed. ‘If we like one another, we’ll play, and see how that works out. One of them might come to stay here for a while, so we can get to know one another, or I might go for a visit to his home.’ She took a deep breath and sat up straighter. ‘The truth is, I might not find someone right off. Master Claudius says I have to prepare myself for that possibility. But that’s all right—it’s more important to get it right, this time, than it is to just have someone for the sake of having someone.’
Hermione felt her heart twist with pity for her friend. What if Professor Snape had brought her here, as had been his original plan, and interviewed Dominants to ‘place’ her with someone? How awful it would have been! Of course, Kell wasn’t in love with Claudius—though she had once implied that she had loved one of the two Dominants who had released her—but Kell seemed so sad, lately. Hermione didn’t know what to do to help.

‘Let me know if you need someone to talk to,’ she said softly.

Kell gave her a brave attempt at her usual smile. ‘Thanks,’ she said. ‘It’s good to have you here for dinner—everyone else is a bit knitting-mad, these days.’ She rolled her eyes expressively towards the other witches, and Hermione pressed her lips together to keep from laughing out loud.

On Friday morning, a message from her Master greeted her from her journal.

little one,

Tonight everyone will gather at Roissy House for the weekend, and though I will not be at your side, I will be there in spirit. Your collar will act to protect you from unwanted advances—and after witnessing your punishment on the St Andrew’s Cross, there can be no doubt in the minds of the community of my avid interest in your well-being—but you may still find yourself bereft in the company of those actively practicing their D/s play.

You will find that properly preparing your mind for the events to come will help maintain your inner calm. An hour before you dress to go down to dinner, you will run a hot bath. You will apply your nipple clamps and slip into the bathtub. For fifteen minutes, you will soak and occasionally tug on the chain between your clamps, feeling the pull between your legs, as your cunt aches for my cock. At the end of fifteen minutes, you will remove the clamps, and as the feeling rushes along your nerve endings, you will put your fingers in your quim and rub your slick clit until you come. Say my name as the climax rushes through you, my pet, for it is I who control your orgasms, and each one you experience belongs to me, and me alone.

Wash and dry and prepare yourself for your evening, remembering all the while that you are mine, and your beauty of person and submissive nature are a reflection of our relationship. Go forth to the dinner party with the full assurance of my confidence in you. Keep to t’s company, for the two of you can look out for one another in the absence of your Masters.

In my mind’s eye, I can clearly see how lovely you will be tonight. When you retire for the evening, write a full account of all that you have seen and heard in your journal, after which you may use one of your toys to fuck your hole, as I would do if I were there. Feel my tongue upon your nipples as you move the dildo in and out of your body, and know that I am thinking of you, even as you are thinking of me. Come hard for me, my pet, and feel the heat of my come in your quim as you fall asleep.

Your Master,

SS
Reading the frank eroticism of his letter made her slick with want, which she thought, with a wry smile, was undoubtedly his intent. She went down to breakfast to eat her porridge and toast when what she wanted was to finger herself to happy thoughts of her Master and his thick cock, glistening with the juices of her quim.

The house was in a happy buzz of anticipation that day, in preparation for receiving their guests, and Kell was a nervous wreck, distracted and unfocussed. She left the lunch table after pushing chicken pie about on her plate without eating a bite. Taffy and Hermione sat together companionably over their lunches, quietly discussing what they would wear to the party that night, as around them their housemates left one-by-one to oversee different aspects of preparations for the weekend.

‘Severus said I should stay with you,’ Hermione told t as she wiped her mouth and placed her napkin on the table.

Taffy smiled wryly. ‘Yes, I believe he and Rafe have decided there’s safety in numbers for us,’ she said. ‘What harm do they imagine can come to us at Roissy House?’

Hermione chuckled and shook her head. ‘Maybe they just want to be here, too.’

As he was leaving the room, Hadrian paused behind their seats and gently patted them each on the shoulder. ‘Severus and Rafe want very much to be here with you,’ he said, ‘but in their absence, they want you to be company for each other.’ He paused for a moment, then said in a quiet tone, ‘I would very much appreciate it if you would both keep an eye on Kell this weekend. I want to do everything in my power to make sure things go smoothly for her.’

Taffy reached up and squeezed the hand resting on her shoulder, tipping her head back to look up into Hadrian’s face. ‘Of course we will,’ she promised. ‘You’ve already done a lot for Kell, and I know she appreciates it. I’m sure everything will go well.’

Hadrian pressed his lips together, looking grave. ‘We’ll see,’ he said and gave a nod before he left the dining room.

As Hadrian passed through the doorway, Pitty squeezed by him with a large, glossy red box in one arm, adorned with a shiny white bow. In the other arm, she had a glossy white box adorned with a shiny red bow.

‘What do you have there, Pitty?’ Taffy asked.

Hermione recognised the discreet, embossed insignia on the boxes; they were from Twilfitt and Tatting, the wizards’ Harrods, in Diagon Alley. Pitty stopped between their chairs and extended the boxes, and Hermione and t turned in their seats until they were knee-to-knee. Each of the posh gift boxes bore a gilt-edged tag with the faintest tracing of a heart at its centre; the tag on the red box was inscribed with Hermione’s name, the one on the white box had t’s. Hermione’s heart turned over when she recognised her Master’s handwriting.

‘Ooh!’ Taffy cried, taking the box from the house-elf’s hands. ‘A present!’

Hermione thanked Pitty and accepted her own box, rubbing a loving fingertip along the embossed T & T. ‘Do you think they went shopping for us?’ she said, between excitement and consternation.
'Definitely,' Taffy said, removing the ribbon from her box. ‘What are you waiting for?’

Hermione slipped the white ribbon from the corner of the deep rectangular box, then she removed the stiff fitted lid, only to encounter a wealth of white tissue paper covered with red hearts. Had her professor actually bought her a Valentine’s gift? How unlikely was that?

Encouraged by the exclamations uttered by her friend, she parted the tissue paper to find a silky garment the colour of the hearts on the tissue paper. ‘Oh!’ she breathed, grasping the halter straps and lifting the dress from the box. ‘It’s beautiful!’

Already, t was on her feet, a white cocktail dress with silver beading held in her hands. ‘Oh, just wait until I get my hands on you, Rafe Lestrange,’ she said, holding the dress against her and gazing down her body. ‘I’ll give you a proper thank-you for this!’

Hermione mimicked t, at the same time thrilled and alarmed by the deeply décolleté crimson gown, which dipped in a narrowing vee to the waistline of the fiery dress, the edges of the neckline held together by three fine silvery chains, the last of which would hit just below her breasts. She looked up, her eyes meeting t’s and they said simultaneously, ‘You’ll look amazing!’

Taffy laid her dress along the back of her chair and bent to pick up the box from the floor. ‘There’s a note!’ she said, taking up another of the heart-embossed gilt cards from the tissue paper.

Hermione bent to riffle through the tissue paper and brought out a stiff card with her professor’s scrawl on the back.

little one,

I am unable to be with you on this St Valentine’s Day weekend at Roissy House, but I want you to feel my hands upon your skin in the silky fabric of this cocktail dress. You will be exquisite, and happy, I hope, in the knowledge that you are cherished as the submissive I never thought to find.

Yours,

SS

P.S. In the smaller box, you will find a little something to wear on Saturday night in the Dungeons. Sexy, but not too revealing.

Hermione read the postscript through tears, a huge lump in her throat in reaction to her Master’s words. He cherished her … She was the submissive he had never hoped to find … He had signed the card not ‘Your Master’, but simply ‘Yours’.

Taffy bent over, concern in her blue eyes. ‘Are you all right?’ she asked. ‘Why are you crying? Did he say something sweet?’

Hermione nodded mutely, tucking the precious card in her pocket, and t chuckled.

‘Who would’ve thought the grouch had it in him to write sweet things to his love?’ she said
teasingly. She plucked a paper tissue from her pocket and handed it to Hermione. ‘Still, it’s nothing to cry about, silly.’

Hermione accepted the tissue, staring at T with her mouth agape. His love? Did t know something she, Hermione, didn’t know?

‘I think we’d better investigate what’s under the tissue paper,’ Taffy said, turning away. ‘Rafe says it’s something to wear tomorrow night, but it can’t be very big, can it?’

Hermione lifted the tissue paper from the box, and found underneath a shallow white box with magenta ribbon criss-crossed over the top … rather like corset lacing! The box was held closed by a big magenta ribbon, and as Hermione untied the bow, she heard Taffy cry, ‘He went to Fairy Goth Mother!’

In the small box was a filmy black negligee, a babydoll with black satin frills. Beneath the feather-light babydoll was the tiniest black thong Hermione had ever seen. The top was split from the centre of the bra and would leave her midriff and tummy bare, down to the edge of the wee knickers.

All in all, she would have felt more dressed in her corset!

‘Let me see!’ Taffy said happily, thrusting her silky nightdress into Hermione’s hands and taking possession of the black babydoll.

Obediently, Hermione examined the ivory satin babydoll with a stretchy lace top that t would wear on Saturday night. Even this garment provided more coverage than her own gift. Remembering something, she looked up at t.

‘But last time, you wore, um … nothing on Dungeon night,’ she said awkwardly.

Taffy grinned wickedly. ‘I know—but I never go bare unless my Master is here with me. Otherwise, it’s just asking for trouble.’ She raised an eyebrow at Hermione. ‘You were rather bare yourself for your punishment, if you’ll recall.’

Hermione flushed scarlet and stood to gather the components of her gift package into some semblance of order. ‘I haven’t forgotten,’ she muttered, and t’s trill of laughter followed her out into the corridor as she retreated to her room.

Though she found it somewhat difficult to concentrate in her room that afternoon, Hermione settled down with the ancient spell book and forced herself to struggle over translating the ancient runic script. If legend were to be believed, somewhere in this book there existed a counter-curse to the spell Tom Riddle had used to create a new body. If she could just translate it, she could put into Harry’s hands the weapon he needed to defeat his enemy—and the war would be over, and her life could truly begin.

So she immersed herself once again in the confusing, frustrating language of a civilisation long dead, determined to wrest from its depths the knowledge which would empower the Light to triumph over the Dark.
With their arms linked together as they wandered through the receptions rooms after dinner that night, Hermione and Taffy were as pretty as a picture. Hermione was dark, and Taffy was fair, and Hermione’s red dress was the perfect foil for the delicacy of T’s silver-spangled white. There was a taut sexual overtone to the interactions of the people present, but Hermione passed amongst their numbers serene, having brought herself to shouting orgasm at her Master’s behest in the bath, just as he had instructed. Taffy was so placid that Hermione suspected she had done the same thing, though Hermione would never ask her.

‘Let’s join the dancers,’ Taffy suggested. ‘I love to dance.’

Hermione willingly turned in that direction. ‘Rafe won’t mind?’ she asked curiously.

‘Not at all,’ she said. ‘As long as the Dominant is respectful, he doesn’t mind if I dance with other men—and Severus won’t either,’ she added firmly.

Hermione wondered if that were true, but she didn’t want to argue about it. The orchestra was playing, and people were dancing. Taffy was quickly solicited to dance by a smiling Dominant with a French accent, and Hermione seated herself, content to watch.

‘You’re far too pretty to be a wallflower,’ a familiar voice said, and Hermione turned her face to see Reg.

‘Hi!’ she said, smiling at him. ‘I haven’t seen you in forever.’

He shrugged. ‘I’ve been visiting friends,’ he said vaguely.

‘A woman,’ Hermione said.

Reggie snorted but did not reply.

‘You left rather suddenly,’ she said tentatively.

Reg gave her a severe look. ‘You’re a nosey little girl,’ he informed her. Hermione didn’t answer, and he sighed. ‘Claudius suggested I should visit elsewhere for a while,’ he admitted glumly.

Hermione blinked in surprise. ‘But why?’ she asked.

Taffy and her Frenchman danced past, chatting amiably, and were followed by Kell, looking radiant in a blue dress which matched her pretty eyes, dancing with a stocky young man with short sandy hair and a serious mien.

Reg stood abruptly and reached for Hermione’s hand. ‘Never mind why,’ he said, his eyes hard. ‘That dress needs to dance, whether you do or not,’ he informed her. ‘Come along.’

Hermione giggled, imagining that he was perfectly right about her dress. With aplomb which seemed out of character for the curly-haired Reg, he spun her into the dance, and they proceeded to have an enjoyable half-an-hour. At the end of each song, they would stand together, chatting, and when no one else approached to ask Hermione to dance, Reg, would invite her to dance again. They chatted about her revision for her NEWTs, and about his job as an economist for the Ministry Department of Finance.
'I can’t believe you’re an economist,’ she said for perhaps the third time.

‘You have a pretty low opinion of me,’ he said crossly, glaring as Kell floated past in the arms of a tall, thin Dominant with skin the colour of espresso coffee. ‘I earned honours in Arithmancy, you know.’

Hermione smiled ruefully. ‘You don’t seem very … ’ she trailed off, unsure of how to express herself.

The song ended, and Reg stepped away from her. ‘You should see me at work,’ he informed her stiffly. ‘Here, you should dance with someone else, now—I don’t think my ego can withstand much more of your admiration.’ He delivered her back to the chair where she had been sitting when he found her, and he strode out of the room, following a handsome blond whose hand was closed about Kell’s.

Hermione watched him shadowing the aspirant for Kell’s favours, thinking she could understand quite well why Claudius had asked Reg to find someplace else to be while the interview process for Kell’s Dominant was underway.

By midnight, Hermione and Taffy were curled up in the comfortable armchairs in Hermione’s room, both of them in their warmest dressing gowns. On the low table between them was a steaming pot of hot chocolate, and as they sipped it, they discussed the evening.

‘What did you think of Kell’s suitors?’ t asked curiously.

‘I didn’t meet them,’ Hermione admitted, ‘though I saw them. There was the stodgy one, the tall one, and the blond.’

Taffy laughed. ‘Well, that about sums it up, I suppose,’ she agreed. ‘The stodgy one is Master Dennis, from Galway. He’s thirty, single, and a dentist.’

Hermione perked up at this news. ‘A dentist?’ she said. ‘My parents are dentists.’

Taffy nodded; they had discussed this before. ‘The tall one is Master Aurelius, from Glasgow. He’s thirty-four, in a vanilla marriage, but he lives separately from his wife, and his submissive would live with him. He owns a greengrocer’s in the wizarding district there.’

Hermione made a moue of distaste. ‘I don’t think I could have a relationship with a married Dominant,’ she said. ‘I know it’s fairly common, but I don’t think I’d like it.’

Taffy gave her a level look. ‘Well, it’s Kell’s choice, isn’t it? And she approved all three of these men to come for an interview, so she knew Master Aurelius was married when she agreed to meet with him.’

Hermione nodded. ‘If she chooses him, I’ll be supportive, I promise.’

Taffy seemed satisfied with this. ‘Good,’ she said. ‘The last one is my personal pick of the three,’ she added with a gleam of mischief. ‘Master David is twenty-eight, single, lives in Dorset, and plays
Chaser for the Wimborne Wasps.’

Hermione gaped. ‘He’s a Quidditch player?’ she said. ‘The handsome blond I saw Kell with?’

Taffy nodded, looking quite satisfied. ‘Yes, and he’s sweet and funny. Just the sort Kell needs.’

Hermione mulled this over as Taffy sat forward, replacing her cup on the table. ‘One thing I’ll say about being pregnant,’ she said, rising to her feet. ‘I get simply exhausted with no warning at all.’ She yawned hugely and shuffled to the door. ‘I’ll see you tomorrow,’ she said as she slipped out into the corridor.

Hermione picked up her journal and crawled into her bed, quill in hand. She had a lot to write to her Master about before fulfilling his last command for her day, and using a dildo to fuck herself before she slept, imagining him between her thighs, labouring over her body, his black eyes boring into hers.

In her dream, he sat at her work table, the book open before him, his brow furrowed. Then he closed the book and turned to her.

‘I don’t care if he is married,’ he said gravely. ‘An economical greengrocer is better than a Quidditch-playing dentist.’ He picked up the book Harry had given her and tapped the spine with his finger. ‘The answer is in the history, Hermione. It’s always in the history. Just look at Kell and Reg.’

And then he was gone, and she rolled over, holding his pillow to her face, desperately seeking his scent.

Hermione stayed in her room for breakfast, thinking that a houseful of guests would keep Hadrian from noticing her absence, and she had Pitty bring a pot of tea, which she drank as she mulled over her dream from the night before. Surely the bit about economical greengrocers and Quidditch-playing dentists was just her mind’s way of mulling through the new information about the Dominants interested in Kell, but what of that last bit? About the answer being in history?

Stymied by her inability to translate the Elder Futhark runes into understandable words, she pulled out her History of Magic textbook, and began to revise, concentrating on the first and second centuries AD, when the Celts had used the runic language for written communications.

She was dressing to go downstairs for the evening when Pitty popped into her room.

‘This was delivered for you, Miss,’ the little house-elf said, coming forward with a cardboard cube with a cellophane window.

Hermione identified the container at once as a florists box, the sort her mother had received from her father on special occasions, holding fresh flower corsages for her mother to wear pinned to her dress. She took the box with a word of thanks and extracted a wrist corsage of red roses. The card said
simply, *Read your journal.*

Holding the flowers to her nose, she inhaled their scent, even as she flicked over the pages of her journal to find his entry.

little one,

*I hope this St Valentine’s Day finds you happy and well. Certainly, from the reports I read of your adventures last night, rubbing your pretty little clit for me, I know you are, at the very least, a well satisfied little slut. Be aware that the demonstrations you will observe tonight in the Dungeon will set your quim on fire. You have my permission to satisfy yourself as often as you wish in the manner of your choice, whether public or private. Your only restriction is that no one else may touch your body; that pleasure is reserved to me, alone.*

*You know you are the only submissive I have ever collared; I also want you to know you are the only woman to whom I have ever sent flowers. Today is recognised by most as an occasion upon which one pays tribute to one’s lover. I would not slight you in any observance of your position in my life, pet. Wear your flowers with your naughty little negligee and know you are in my thoughts now, as always.*

*Your Master,*

*SS*

Hermione was unsurprised, when she braved the walk down the corridor in her minimal apparel, to see that T in her ivory satin and lace, wore upon her wrist the palest of pink roses. They laughed and hugged one another, fellow travellers in this life of waiting for their men to return safely home to them. Linking arms as they had done the night before, they strolled amongst the D/s society of Roissy House, perfect contrasts for one another, fair and dark, ivory and black, pale pink and dark red.

As they approached the room in which refreshments were on offer, Taffy stopped. ‘I want some punch,’ she said. ‘Can I get you anything?’

‘No, thanks,’ Hermione answered.

‘I’ll be back,’ Taffy promised, and she entered the refreshment room.

A mild-looking man in black leather walked by, leading three naked women on jewelled leads, and Hermione exchanged friendly nods with them. Then the door across the hall opened, and she heard voices.

‘I am perfectly unimpaired,’ an icy voice proclaimed. ‘I do not need instructions on how to comport myself, Hadrian! No, I don’t need your escort, Claudius. I am perfectly capable of watching for impropriety without any assistance!’

Hermione shrank back in alarm as Reg strode through the door, looking stern and sure of himself—
looking, Hermione thought, more like a Dominant than she had ever seen him before. He passed her by without a glance, and Claudius stepped to the door of the Dominant’s Study to push it closed.

Taffy joined her again with a glass of punch, and the two smiled at the doorkeeper of the Dungeon before they descended into the darkness.

Hermione was very glad for the presence of Taffy as they moved down the stairs. She felt eyes on her body, knew that people were looking at her all-but nakedness, and felt strangely aroused by the knowledge. An ache began, between her thighs, and a shiver ran through her, crinkling her nipples in the satin cups of the negligee.

Halfway down the stairs, she saw that the St Andrew’s Cross was in use, and she was not surprised to see Kell bound to the wooden structure. Kell wore her jaunty green suspender belt with silky stockings, but her thong lay upon the floor at her feet, and the feather in her hair trembled with her shuddering breaths. Master David, the strapping blond Quidditch player, whipped her with a long-tailed leather flogger. He wore tight black trousers but was bare-chested, his broad shoulders sweaty beneath the bright lights. Kell was bound with her back to the cross, her chest, tummy, and thighs flushed from the blows to her body with the thudding leather thongs of the flogger. Kell’s eyes were closed as Master David whipped her naked breasts, her pert nipples erect, and as the blows angled down her body, Hermione saw the unconscious forward jerks of Kell’s hips, knowing her friend hoped the perfect blow would land between her legs, completing the orgasm building in her body from the loving attention of her Dominant.

‘Oh, she’s having a nice time,’ Taffy purred into Hermione’s ear, her eyes fixed on Kell and Master David.

Hermione felt the ache between her legs intensify, wanting the thud of the leather thongs on her breasts and bum and quim. Dear Merlin but she missed her Master! ‘She must really like him,’ she murmured, watching Kell strain towards the flogger, inarticulate cries falling from Kell’s lips.

‘Not necessarily,’ Taffy said objectively, her own slender body swaying slightly, as if she, too, longed for the attentions of her Master. ‘It’s not as if he’s kissing her or touching her with his hands or his cock. No, she’s in love with the flogger.’

Hermione looked again at the handsome Master David, mulling over that information. Could she get off on having someone other than her Master whip her? Would it feel the same to her, if it was someone other than him? It was hard for her to imagine such a thing, but it was something to think about.

‘Oh my—look at Reggie.’

Hermione’s head swivelled to follow T’s line of sight, and she saw Reg standing at the front of the crowd, directly behind Master David, his furious gaze fastened on the spectacle before him.

‘What’s wrong with him?’ Hermione wondered. ‘He looks really angry.’

Taffy shook her head. ‘He’s supposed to be keeping an eye on Kell—he, Claudius, or Hadrian has to be with her for all of her play this weekend. But if it makes him angry, I don’t know why he volunteered. Claudius could do it, just as easily.’

Kell’s piercing cry drew all eyes back to her, and the rictus of pleasure on her face was enough to let them all know that Master David had successfully whipped her to orgasm. Master David laid the
flogger upon a table and approached the shuddering submissive, his blond hair dark with sweat. Hermione watched unabashedly as the big man tenderly released Kell’s ankles, sliding his hands up her trembling legs as if she were a nervous racehorse. Hermione waited for him to touch or kiss Kell’s pubis, but he stood, leaning forward to murmur into Kell’s ear, his hands busy unfastening her wrists from the wooden cross. Kell swayed on her feet, and David swung her easily up into his arms, earning a shining smile from Kell. He bent forward and kissed her lightly on the lips, then carried her into a dark recess, and the crowd applauded enthusiastically, including Masters Dennis and Aurelius, who looked less than keen.

‘I think that was sweet,’ Hermione said, feeling happy for Kell. ‘Don’t you think so?’ she asked t, but her friend didn’t answer. She turned, perplexed, and saw t sitting on the floor, her face pale. Hermione knelt down. ‘Are you all right?’

Taffy gripped Hermione’s arms, her eyes panicked. ‘No. There’s something wrong.’

Hermione looked into t’s face, but other than her wan complexion, she could see nothing wrong with her friend. ‘Is it too warm for you?’ she asked anxiously.

There was a commotion behind her, and Hermione saw Vi pushing through the crowd of people, who were looking at t as if she were the next entertainment on offer. Vi had a knitted shawl from one of the sofas in her hands, and she knelt, wrapping the shawl around t with practiced ease.

‘Hermione,’ Vi said, and the command in her tone brought Hermione’s eyes to Vi’s face. ‘You must find Pitty and tell her we’ve gone to St Mungo’s, do you understand? Tell Pitty.’

Hermione opened her mouth to reply, but Vi and t were gone, leaving Hermione kneeling on the cold Dungeon floor in a pool of bright red blood.
Taffy shifted restlessly beneath the thin white blanket, murmuring in her sleep, and Hermione sat forward, ready to rise if her friend awoke. Her wristwatch reported the time as half-three; they had been in hospital now for three hours. The Healers had laboured over Taffy, halting the bleeding and stabilising her before putting her into an enchanted sleep. It was too soon to know if the baby had survived; they would have to wait and see.

Hermione had delivered the requested message to Pitty, thrown on jeans and a jumper, and was fastening her cloak about her as she Disapparated to St Mungo's. She had joined Vi in the hospital corridor, and very soon, Hadrian and Elinore had arrived to wait with them to hear the news about Taffy and her baby. It had been decided that Hermione would stay the night, and Vi would come in the morning to take over watching over their friend.

The other patients on the ward were mothers with new babies; Hermione lived in dread of the moment Taffy would wake up and hear a baby crying.

There was a commotion in the corridor, and then she heard a familiar voice coming down the ward. 'Why is my wife not in a private room?' Rafe demanded imperiously of the mediwitch hurrying in his wake. 'I don't want her in this room with all these healthy babies! She must be moved at once!'

'Please, Mr. Smith,' the breathless mediwitch said, 'keep your voice down! It's the middle of the night!'

Hermione leapt to her feet and rounded the curtain about Taffy's bed.

'Hermione!' Rafe exclaimed, and his large hands closed on her shoulders. 'How is she?'

'Resting,' Hermione responded, looking up into Rafe's strained, anxious face.

'The baby?' he asked, more softly.

'Too soon to know,' she answered.

He moved past her and bent over Taffy, smoothing her golden brown hair from her forehead. 'My darling,' he murmured, and to Hermione's surprise, Taffy opened her eyes.

'Master,' she murmured, pressing her cheek into his hand, and Hermione stepped in front of the mediwitch, blocking the Lestranges from her view.
'Could you please transfer Mrs. Smith to a private room?' she asked, speaking loudly enough for the whispered exchange between the couple behind her to be obscured. She didn't want to have to explain to anyone why the patient referred to her husband as 'Master' rather than 'Darling'. 'Her husband won't rest until you do,' she added with a friendly smile, 'and you really don't want to have to deal with that.'

The mediwitch looked harried. 'I'll see about it,' she said uncertainly.

'It'll be worth your time,' Hermione promised.

In mere minutes, the St Mungo’s staff had effected the move, and t was now resting in her private room, eyes shadowed with worry as she clung to Rafe’s hand. Hermione pulled a straight chair to the farthest corner, trying to give her friends some privacy, torn between going and staying. It was like a keen, visceral pain to watch her Master’s best friend climb up into the hospital bed with his submissive—his wife!—and hold and rock her as if she were precious beyond words.

Dear God but she missed him.

Hermione must have dozed for a bit, for a sound at the door caused her to rouse, her fist closed about the wand in her cloak pocket. The clock on the wall showed half-five. Taffy slept, her chest rising and falling with each breath, but Rafe stood across the room with his wand drawn, one ear pressed to the door.

‘Who is it?’ he hissed, his voice low but carrying.

Hermione could not hear the answer, but the door cracked open and in slid Severus Snape, a wraith whose burning black eyes swept the room, taking inventory of the occupants in the few seconds before he spoke.

‘You cannot stay!’ he said at once to Rafe, one leather-gloved hand gesturing to the door. ‘You’ve been missed—they’re coming.’

‘Damnation!’ Rafe swore, and he turned to t, wretched indecision etched across his features.

Severus grasped Rafe’s arm and pulled him around, stepping into his personal space, speaking with the same quiet authority to which Hermione responded with such trust. ‘If we do not maintain our positions now, it is all for naught. What sort of world do you want for your wife and child?’

Hermione crept forward, wanting with all her heart to wrap her arms about her professor, to cling to him limply until all the fear of the last hours was assuaged by his indomitable presence. But she knew a crisis was upon these two men, and the concerns of her emotions and her needs were as nothing in comparison to the perpetual danger in which they lived.

Rafe stared into the professor’s eyes, warring emotions darting across his handsome face. Hermione knew from the look on her Master’s face that he feared his friend would make the wrong choice, and she dared not to breathe as they waited to hear what Rafe would say—but his voice was not the first to be heard.

‘Go.’

The three standing turned as one to look at t, who watched them from her sickbed, her eyes
shadowed, her skin pasty.

‘Go with Severus,’ she said, her voice sounding stronger, this time. ‘I’ll be fine.’

Rafe strode forward, reaching for her, and Severus turned Hermione around to face him.

‘Are you well?’ he demanded, his manner urgent.

‘Yes,’ she answered. ‘Are you?’

‘Yes,’ he said and jerked her into his arms, burying his face in her hair. ‘I need your help to get us away from here,’ he said softly into her ear. ‘Will you do as I say?’

‘I will,’ she promised, inhaling the scent of his aftershave and fighting the urge to cry. She had him here, in her arms, and she could not so much as ask for a kiss before he must be gone again.

Life was brutally unfair at times.

Five minutes later, she stood in the corridor on the maternity ward wearing a lime green Healer’s robes, her hair charmed a horrible straw yellow colour. Rafe stood tensely before her, but his attention was focussed behind him as he watched over his shoulder. Briefly, Professor Snape’s face appeared around the corner.

‘Now!’ he hissed and disappeared again.

Even as Hermione heard the unmistakeable pop of Apparition, Rafe looked into her face. ‘Forgive me, Hermione,’ he murmured.

‘Think nothing of it,’ Hermione said reassuringly, her heart pounding wildly in her ears. What if the Death Eaters didn’t believe the evidence of their eyes? What if they wanted to speak with her? What if Lucius Malfoy or Bellatrix Lestrange were with them—or someone else who might recognise her?

Then Rafe wrapped her in his arms and kissed her, pressing her hard against the wall, his hands groping parts of her body reserved only for her Master. He smelled wrong, his beard scratched her face, he tasted of drink, and her instinct was to push him away. Yet she remained pliant in his arms, playing her part, listening with all of her concentration.

‘What are you doing here, Snape?’ a loud, rough voice demanded.

‘Visiting the sick, Rodolphus—what do you think I’m doing?’ Professor Snape responded, his tone at once indolent and insolent.

‘Where is he?’ another voice demanded, and there was the sound of hurried footsteps approaching, boots upon the floors.

‘He went that way,’ the professor said, and his voice began to sound closer. ‘I didn’t wish to watch him, you understand.’

Rafe emitted a loud moan and pulled Hermione’s hand to his groin while he trailed loud, smacking
kisses down her throat. Hermione felt around for his penis, perfectly willing to grope him for authenticity, but no bulge was evident—could it be that he was as frightened as she was? She looked over his shoulder and saw three figures coming towards them, her Master in the lead. The other two men were Rafe’s brothers, Rodolphus and Rabastan Lestrange—Hermione recognised them. Immediately, she buried her face in Rafe’s cloak, hoping desperately that neither of the Death Eaters would recognise her face under the unlikely mop of yellow hair.

‘Rafe!’ Rodolphus snapped. ‘Unhand the wench and get back to headquarters! His Lordship didn’t give you leave to come here!’

Rafe’s head rose and looked over his shoulder to his brothers and his friend. ‘I thought you were going to keep watch!’ he said to Severus.

Professor Snape leaned against the wall, rolling his eyes. ‘You fucked her twice in the supply cupboard,’ he said. ‘It’s time to go.’

Rabastan Lestrange stepped forward and took Rafe’s arm. ‘The Dark Lord is angry,’ he said soberly. ‘You can fuck your Mudblood another time—we must go.’

Rafe turned back to Hermione, a sincere tone of apology in his voice. ‘I’m sorry to leave you so abruptly, love,’ he said, reaching out and giving her breast a squeeze. ‘But I’m an important man, and I must away.’

With a final brush of his lips on hers, he turned from her and strode forward to join the other three, and as Hermione watched, they turned on the spot and were gone. With a gasp of mingled grief and relief, she stepped into the supply cupboard behind her and gave in to tears, holding herself in shuddering reaction, the twin assaults on her person and her sensibilities roiling through her in a confusing wash of respite and recriminations.
The Healer visited at daybreak, and after a careful examination, she cast the telling spell—the pearlescent shape of a womb hovered over t’s abdomen, with the persistent little pulsing red spark shining on. Taffy burst into tears, and Hermione cried with her, weak with relief that the baby had survived the bleeding.

‘But what caused it?’ Taffy asked. ‘How can I be sure it won’t happen again?’

‘We can’t know for sure,’ the Healer replied, ‘but we can keep you here for a while and make sure you’re completely well—and the baby is safe—before we send you home.’

Breakfast was served after the Healer left, and t balked at eating. Hermione sympathised over the tasteless fare, but she gently bullied t into eating some of it anyway.

‘For the baby’s sake,’ she reminded her friend, nudging the plate of dry toast closer.

Taffy smiled a frail, watery smile. ‘For the baby,’ she agreed, taking up a small dish of porridge.

Vi arrived soon after, laden with knitting needles and wool, and the two older witches were happily settled over their wee baby things as Hermione departed for Roissy House.

She hurried to her room to check her journal, desperate for news of her Master and Rafe—to know if they had safely returned from their adventures.

She wasn’t disappointed, although the message left her feeling a bit sick with horror.

_ little one,_

_Our Lord was quite unhappy with Maximus, and I am afraid he was punished for his impulsiveness. With the image of his hands on you burned indelibly into my mind, I cannot say I was the most sympathetic of friends. Perhaps I would have done as he did, had it been you in hospital, but I would like to think I have the strength to resist temptation with so much at risk for so many._

_You were magnificent, my pet. I know very well how you feel about having a man other than your Master kiss and fondle you. You deserve a reward of commensurate value, and I regret that I am not there to provide it for you. I have in my mind the treat in store for you, and when next we meet, you will receive it. I will tantalise you by mentioning that it will involve your blindfold, your ball gag, your nipple clamps, your flogger, and my sustained, undivided attention._

_I know your imagination can provide enough detail to make your delicious little slit slick and wet with need. For now, you may satisfy yourself in any way you wish, providing you speak my name as_
Matters are building now to a crescendo. I cannot say for certain that it will be the outcome for which we have worked and sacrificed; there are too many variables for me to be able to postulate. Certainly, the successful completion of the translation over which you labour would be a significant step toward victory, providing your classmate possesses the necessary skill to cast the spell.

In conclusion, my own, I ask that you devote your energies to your special project, that you stay within the confines of Roissy House when you are not paying short visits to our friend in hospital, and that you safeguard your wellbeing in all ways.

Your Master,

SS

P.S. – Leave a short message when you have read this entry, for I will begin taking a leaf from your book—I will destroy each message when you’ve received it, for obvious reasons.

Hermione sat back, feeling a tangle of confused emotions. She had tended to her Master after a punishment from Voldemort, and she hated to think of Rafe reduced to the same condition. It hurt her a bit to think that Severus would not have come to her as Rafe had come to Taffy—would her Master not rush to her side if she were in danger of losing their child?—but at the same time, there was a ruthless streak of practicality in Hermione. Many people were denying themselves for the sake of the Light, and it would be tragic if it were all undone by a foolish choice made by someone thinking only of his own personal welfare or that of his immediate family. Wartime made sacrificers of them all, didn’t it?

It was gratifying to know that her professor had hated seeing her in Rafe’s arms. Hermione had cried in the St Mungo’s storeroom, but she had washed her face before returning to t and holding her while she cried. Hermione would never tell t what had happened in the corridor. If Rafe chose to tell her, that was his prerogative, but for her part, she would prefer not to know something hurtful, if the knowledge served no good purpose, so she would do Taffy the courtesy of keeping her mouth shut. Still, it was daunting to think that Severus might have thought Rafe deserved a bit of Voldemort’s torture for endangering them all—and for putting his hands on Hermione.

The flash of heat between her thighs when she read of her planned reward—and yes, her imagination was definitely up to the task of providing ample details to drive her mad with longing—had been delicious, but it could not persist in the face of the sobering news about the coming culmination of the war. The spell was the most important factor in what was coming—the spell hidden in the book she had, as yet, failed to translate into sensible English. She had to succeed in wringing a working spell from the ancient runes in the book Harry had given her, or the Dark might triumph over the Light—and Hermione was not at all sure that life under Lord Voldemort would be worth the living.

Pushing aside all thought save the need to get to work on translation, she took up her quill and scratched a quick acknowledgement of her Master’s message, knowing the next time she opened her journal, his note would be gone.
At dinner that night, most everyone was quiet. Kell was the only exception. Reg was at table; Hermione wondered if he was back because of Kell’s apparent interest in Master David, but she did not voice the question. Kell’s ebullience carried an almost manic edge as she chattered about Master David and her proposed visit to him in Dorset the following weekend.

‘He has a small house, but one bedroom would be set aside for my use, and I would be permitted to decorate it,’ she said brightly. ‘He said he has no objection to me finding a job, either.’

Hermione looked up from her soup, surprised. ‘I’ve never asked you what sort of work you prefer, Kell,’ she said.

Kell’s grin was infectious. ‘Since I left school, I’ve worked at a few different wizarding primary schools,’ she said. ‘I teach the ickle ones their reading, writing, and sums.’

Hermione grinned back, easily able to imagine Kell in that role with small children. ‘That’s brilliant,’ she declared.

Reg snorted. ‘Don’t know why he’s looking for a live-in submissive if he can’t afford to support her,’ he muttered into his creamy chicken soup.

‘He can support me!’ Kell retorted, her face flushing.

Hermione glanced between them, wondering at Kell’s abrupt mood change from cheerful to stormy.

‘Just because he’s willing to let me work doesn’t mean there’s something wrong with him!’ she added shrilly.

‘Kelly,’ Claudius said, and the tone in which he spoke the name was enough to make Hermione sit up straighter and direct her attention back to her food. Kell was obviously hovering close to crossing the line established for her behaviour, and Hermione put soup in her mouth, silently hoping that her friend would back down before she got in trouble with Master Claudius.

Hermione excused herself after dinner, pleading the need to study, and she retired to her room to struggle fruitlessly with the ancient runes until she was too weary to continue. She desperately needed a bit of inspiration to provide the necessary break—a realignment of her perspective that would allow a new standpoint from which to work.

Just before sleep, she wrote of this in her journal, admitting as well that she had not brought herself to orgasm that day. It was difficult to think about her own gratification with so much riding on her ability to translate the ancient runes into a usable spell.

In her dream, he sat on the edge of her bed, one long-fingered hand smoothing the tangle of her hair away from her face. His pale, narrow face stared down at her, faint ambient light providing enough illumination for her to delineate the large, hooked nose and burning black eyes.

‘You’re neglecting yourself,’ he said without preamble. ‘I value you as a sexual creature. You must not permit that part of you to shrivel.’
Hermione stared up at him, disoriented. Even his scent was proper, the signature aftershave, now overlaid with the smell of unwashed man, as if he had not bathed since last she had seen him. ‘Are you really here?’ she said, grasping his robes in her fist.

‘You’re neglecting the history, as well,’ he added, as if she had not spoken.

‘Tell me what to do!’ she cried, sitting bolt upright in her bed, but she was alone in the cold room, the fire in the hearth burned down to mere embers.

With a muttered imprecation, Hermione flung the bedclothes back and scrambled to her work table, but instead of taking up the infuriating book written in ancient runes, she took up her History of Magic text and dived beneath the covers again, snapping her fingers to light the candles on her bedside table.

She dozed again near daybreak, her heavy History of Magic book open on her chest. She did not hear Pitty’s entrance, nor did she wake before the tea in the pot left on her work table was dead cold. Thankfully, though, Pitty had built up the fire again during her visit, so that when Hermione woke with a start at midday, the room was warm as she scuttled into the bathroom to relieve herself. There was something hovering just on the edge of her consciousness—something to do with *history*—but she couldn’t grasp it.

She took a quick bath, dressed, and went down to the dining room, her stomach rumbling at the smell of shepherd’s pie. The only person present was Elinore, and she smiled when Hermione took her seat.

‘We missed you at breakfast,’ she said. ‘I hope you won’t mind me saying that you’re looking a bit tired, Hermione.’

Hermione sighed. ‘I’m really struggling with my latest assignment,’ she said. She didn’t suppose that Elinore Hunter really knew or cared about her studies, but it was a relief to speak of them, nonetheless. ‘Where is everyone today?’

‘Vi and Kell went to sit with t,’ Elinore said. ‘Reg is at work, and Hadrian and Claudius had business out of town, today.’

Hermione looked up eagerly. ‘How is t?’

Elinore smiled. ‘She’s doing better. The Healers want to keep her for several days, to monitor her and feed her up a bit and make sure the baby is in good health.’

Hermione relaxed. It was good to hear that Taffy was getting stronger, and she was happy to know Vi and Kell were with her. She felt a bit guilty not to be with them, but she was the only one entrusted with the job of translating the spell; it wasn’t as if she could hand the task off to someone else.

‘You said you’re having some difficulty with your assignment?’ Elinore said, her tone warm. ‘That must be very frustrating for you.’
Hermione nodded, digging into her pie. ‘There’s something I’m missing,’ she said. ‘I’ve even
dreamed about it a couple of times.’

‘Perhaps if you explain it to me, it will do you good,’ Elinore suggested.

Hermione drank deeply from her glass of milk before she wiped her mouth and spoke again. ‘All
right,’ she said and began to explain, in broad outline, the history of the runic language and her
current task.

‘Well,’ Elinore said when she had done, ‘what does your history book say about the runes
themselves? I can’t remember that I learned anything about Ancient Runes in History of Magic
class.’

Hermione shook her head and accepted a dish of treacle tart from a house-elf. ‘I can’t find any
reference in the history book to runic language. There’s a section that talks about how magic was
hidden from the Muggles in the first and second centuries but nothing specifically about runes
themselves.’ She dipped her spoon into the clotted cream and licked it clean. ‘I may need to visit
Flourish and Blotts to find a reference book.’

Elinore made a sound of distress, and when Hermione looked up, she said, ‘I’m just remembering
how your last visit to Diagon Alley went,’ she said apologetically. ‘I wouldn’t want you to be in
trouble with Master Severus for disobedience.’

Hermione sighed deeply and pushed the pudding away from her. ‘I don’t want that either, but I feel
as if I am being forced to work without my greatest asset.’

Elinore nodded, her brow knitted. ‘I know you miss him,’ she said gently.

‘No!’ Hermione said with some force. ‘I meant the Hogwarts Library! I don’t know how I can be
expected to do the necessary research without having access to research materials!’

‘I see,’ Elinore said, clearly nonplussed.

Hermione stood. ‘I apologise for being dull company,’ she said. ‘I really need to go back upstairs.
Thanks for listening.’

Elinore inclined her head. ‘You’re welcome, my dear. I sincerely hope you discover the information
you need.’

‘So do I,’ Hermione responded soberly and returned to her room.

She wrote in her journal that night of her dream and her desire to visit the Hogwarts library. Her
Master’s response was almost immediate and not entirely unpredictable.

Hermione, you will under no circumstances leave Roissy House to visit Hogwarts! The school is
under constant surveillance, and other than coming knocking at the door of my Lord’s headquarters
with a collecting tin for the charity bazaar, you could scarcely go anywhere more fraught with
danger. You cannot persist in this stupid, thoughtless disregard for my constant warnings, or I will be forced to take matters into my own hands.

Yes, I have both read and understood the nature of your dilemma; I am not without sympathy. I am doubtful that a trip to Flourish and Blotts will avail much, but if you must go, do so only with Hadrian, Claudius, or Reg in attendance, and go under a Disillusionment Charm.

Do not despair, my pet. Soldier on, and if there is a God—which I daily doubt more surely than the day before—you will one day receive your just reward.

Your Master,

SS

Hermione scowled over this message, scribbling a quick reply that she had read and understood it so he could purge it from his journal. How could he expect her to do the job she’d been assigned if her persisted in denying her access to the resources she needed? If a Disillusionment Charm would suffice for Diagon Alley, why would it not suffice for Hogwarts? Why did he persist in doubting her magical abilities?

Nevertheless, at breakfast the next morning, Reg spoke as soon as she entered the dining room. ‘I’ll be ready to leave for Diagon Alley at ten o’clock,’ he informed her crisply.

Hermione longed to say she wouldn’t go, but her common sense won out over her irritation. The important thing, she reminded herself, was to find the information she needed to solve the puzzle of the rune translation.

‘I’ll meet you at ten,’ she responded, forcing herself to add, ‘Thanks, Reg.’

Out in the frigid February air, Hermione found her spirits improved, if only to be outdoors, under the pale blue winter sky. She cast a sideways glance to Reggie, only to find him scowling as he scanned the area, his wand hand out of sight in the pocket of his cloak.

‘Did he tell you to bring me?’ she asked curiously.

‘Hush,’ he responded repressively. ‘I can’t trot along chatting with you or your Disillusionment Charm will be worthless, won’t it?’

‘Fine,’ she muttered sourly, knowing Reg was right but irritated anyway.

They moved quickly from the Leaky Cauldron to the book store, and as they entered, Reg murmured, ‘Pass your books to me, and I’ll pay for them—no argument.’

Hermione hadn’t thought of that, so she didn’t argue, but she did huff loudly as she passed Reg and disappeared into the history section of the towering shelves.

Once surrounded by the smell of the new books, she forgot about her escort. She was, as always, enthralled to be surrounded by stacks of books she had not read. The history section was carefully sectioned by geographical area, time period, and subject matter. Hermione plunged in and began to
Thankfully, there were few people in the shop on this weekday morning, and Reg’s stolid presence at the opening of the aisle gave her the cover she needed to pull books down, rifle through them, and replace them on the shelves undetected. She worked methodically, row by row, shelf by shelf, book by book, her dogged determination standing her in good stead as it had always done. If this book did not contain the answer she sought, there was no guarantee that the next one would not.

Hermione was unaware of the passage of time; she was completely absorbed in her project. At long last, she reached the end of the section. She had chosen only four books from the shelves as possible resources. She hefted them and moved to stand beside Reg.

‘I’m not sure if these are what I’m looking for,’ she confessed quietly.

‘We’re taking the lot. Come!’ Reg responded, taking the books and striding to the clerk at the till.

Hermione refreshed her Disillusionment Charm and trailed Reggie out of the shop, trying not to think about the staggering amount he had just paid out for her books.

‘I’ll pay you back when we get home,’ she said, thinking it would deplete her purse completely.

‘Your Master paid,’ he responded shortly. ‘Take it up with him.’

‘Why are you such a grouch?’ she hissed. ‘It’s not my fault you don’t have the courage to try for her!’

Reg looked in her general direction, surprise registering on his face. ‘She’s not interested in me,’ he said frankly, not bothering to pretend he didn’t understand her meaning.

‘You’re a fool if you think that,’ Hermione replied tartly.

‘Quiet!’ Reg snarled, and he groped blindly for a moment before his hand closed over her shoulder.

In that moment, Hermione saw Simon Curtis emerging from the brick wall behind the Leaky Cauldron in the wake of Gregory Goyle, followed by Crabbe and two older men in black cloaks.

‘Take my arm,’ Reg commanded, his voice steel. ‘Now, Hermione!’

Hermione took his forearm, and the unpleasant sensation of Disapparition was upon her before she could process her reaction to the sight of Simon Curtis and his companions. Then they were in the corridor outside the Dominant’s Study, and she stumbled, feeling nauseated.

‘Finite Incantatem’ Reg said, and as the Disillusionment Charm dropped away from her, he steadied Hermione. ‘Are you all right?’ he asked.

Hermione stood straight. ‘Yes,’ she said.

Reg pushed the carrier bags with the books into her hands. ‘Go up and ask Pitty to bring your lunch,’ he suggested, nodding down the hall toward the stairs. ‘It’s after two.’

As the nausea passed, Hermione realised she was starving. ‘All right,’ she agreed, but before she turned to go, she said, ‘Why do you think Simon Curtis keeps hanging about in London?’
Reg looked grave. ‘I don’t know, but I’m going to speak with Hadrian about it.’ One side of his mouth quirked up, and Hermione glimpsed the Reg she had first known. ‘You go read and apply that brain of yours to the problem your Master wants you to solve—Hadrian will let you know if there’s anything else to worry about.’

Hermione nodded and left him, wondering if his last statement were true or if it were part of the culture of Roissy House for the Dominants to shield their submissives from the harsh realities of the world. Her lips thinned as she began to climb up to her room. She was a sexual submissive, and it made her happy to please her Master, but she did not need to be shielded from the cares of a responsible adult witch, and the sooner Severus Snape understood that, the better off they would be.

She ate the sandwich Pitty brought for her lunch without pausing in her reading, and she allowed the plate of roast beef at dinnertime to grow cold as she read about the evolution of the Celtic language in the Dark Ages. When the clock on the mantel chimed midnight, she put the book aside and rubbed her eyes, exhausted. It was a relief to open her journal and to see her Master’s beloved, spiky script.

\textit{little one,}

\textit{Report says that you found books in Diagon Alley, and I am hopeful that they will be useful to you. I am concerned with your physical well-being, for your last entries here have not convinced me that you are making your health a priority, and I must insist that you do. Tomorrow, you will partake of all your meals at table with the family, and before you sleep tonight, you will follow my instructions explicitly.}

\textit{You will take a fifteen minute bath, and in your bath, you will roll your nipples until they are erect, then you will apply your nipple clamps. Get them on snugly and give the chain a tug, as I would do, to hear your little whimper of pain and pleasure. Then put your fingers between your legs and rub yourself until you come. It should not take long, because you have been neglecting your needs. Rub your clit and give the occasional tug to your clamps, imagining me sitting in a chair beside the bath, watching your every movement, hearing your every breath, and finding the sights and sounds both erotic and beautiful.}

\textit{At the end of fifteen minutes, remove the clamps, dry yourself, and go to the bed. Use your thickest dildo—the one most like me—to slowly move in and out of your hole until you are aroused again. Imagine me holding your arms down and staring into your eyes as I give you a leisurely fucking. When you are close to orgasm, stop. Remove the dildo from your cunt and put it in your mouth. Take it deep, sucking all of the sweet juice from it, as you would with my cock. Suck your dildo and imagine me between your lips, using your mouth for my pleasure. Now finger your cunt, pet, sucking your Master’s dick and rubbing your sweet spot until you climax a second time, imagining the rush of my come in your mouth as I come, too.}

\textit{When you have completed your assignment, write to me about it. Stop whatever you are doing now and do as you’re told, like the good girl you are, and your Master will be pleased.}

\textit{SS}
Hermione actually breathed a sigh of relief as she read his instructions, and she immediately stood to obey, feeling the stress and strain of her unsuccessful studies easing with each step she took to fulfil his commands.

Over the next several days, she read incessantly, stopping only to go to meals. She was inattentive company at best, and at worst, she was utterly distracted. It wasn’t until Saturday morning, when Reggie sat across from her looking like a thundercloud, that Hermione registered the fact that Kell was missing.

‘Is Kell off on her visit to Master David, then?’ she asked Vi, keeping an eye on Reg from the corner of her eye.

‘Yes, Hermione—don’t you remember her saying good-bye to you?’ Vi asked with some exasperation.

‘Sorry,’ Hermione said, having the grace to look a little shame-faced. ‘I’ve been thinking quite a bit about my studies.’

Reg snorted rudely, and Master Claudius laughed out loud, something Hermione had seldom seen the severe Dominant do. ‘Yes, we’re aware,’ he said, still chuckling.

Hermione looked up and down the table with some misgiving; everyone was watching her with varying expressions of amusement. ‘I haven’t meant to be rude,’ she said awkwardly.

‘Pay them no mind, dear,’ Elinore said staunchly. ‘What you’re doing is more important, I’m sure.’

Back in her room, Hermione sat down to finish reading the last of the four books she and Reg had procured from Flourish and Blotts. She had yet to find anything in the history of runic languages to help her with her translation, and she was becoming more disconsolate by the hour. She had less than one hundred pages to read on this book, and unless she found something stunning, she would be right back where she had been a week ago: stumped.

An hour later, she put the book back on the work table. Her suspicion had been correct; there had been nothing in this book, either, to tell her what about the history of the ancient runes would give the key to translating the spell Harry needed.

She sat down with her journal and wrote to her professor.

_Dear Sir,_

_I have finished reading all the books you bought for me, and I did not find what I need. I feel with all my heart that my only recourse is to visit the Hogwarts library. I don’t wish to be disobedient, but it seems to me that having access to those study materials is the next most logical step to completing the translation._

_I miss you with every breath I take and want nothing more than to be in your arms again._

_Love,_
And closing her journal, she picked up the book Harry had given her and began to puzzle over it again.

The morning dragged by, and in the afternoon, she went with Vi and Claudius to visit Taffy at St Mungo’s. Taffy looked bored and fretful, but she cheered up at the sight of her friends and took with eagerness the new soft pink wool Vi had brought for her.

Hermione accepted a pair of knitting needles, calling up her skills from years before, when she had knit clothes for the elves in Gryffindor Tower. As the hours passed, she listened with a strange feeling of comfort to the other witches as they chatted about everyday things, and she knitted a tiny pink cap.

‘That’s quite good for a first try,’ Vi said judiciously, eyeing the cap Hermione had knit.

‘Thanks,’ Hermione grinned, determined not to confess how she had obtained her knitting experience.

They left when her dinner was brought in, and she seemed somewhat cheered by their visit. Hermione hugged her as she left, and t whispered in her ear, ‘Promise you’ll tell me if there’s something I should know, and I’ll do the same for you.’

Hermione pulled back. ‘Of course,’ she said, wondering if she would be able to keep her promise, but unwilling to upset her pregnant friend.

After dinner, she thumbed through the latest edition of *Witch Weekly* in the sitting room, loath to go back to her room and face the books which had failed to help her. She drank her tea when it was served, hoping it would soothe her enough to help her sleep, then bid her friends good night and trudged up the steps to her room.

She was pulling a warm nightdress over her head when Pitty popped into the room, two bulging rucksacks clutched in her spindly arms. The elf’s face was twisted with distress, and blood stained the edge of her neat Roissy House tea-towel.

‘Here are your books from Hogwarts, Miss,’ Pitty squeaked, extending the rucksacks with shaking arms.

Hermione fell to her knees before Pitty. ‘What happened to you?’ she cried, searching the little creature with her eyes, looking for the source of the blood.

Pitty allowed the rucksacks to rest on the floor and stepped back from Hermione, wringing her hands. ‘Nothing is happening to Pitty,’ she said, her voice quivering with some unnamed emotion.

‘Pitty!’ Hermione said sharply as the elf backed away from her. ‘Tell me where you went and what
you saw.’

Pitty’s tennis ball sized eyes grew even wider in alarm. ‘Pitty went to Hogwarts,’ she quavered. ‘Pitty saw Master Severus and Master Rafe.’

Hermione’s heart stopped. ‘Pitty, who was bleeding?’

Pitty shook her head from side to side. ‘Pitty isn’t allowed to say!’ the distraught elf cried. ‘Pitty is sorry, Miss!’

Hermione scarcely noticed when the house-elf disappeared. Instead, she sat on the floor in her nightdress and unpacked the books from the bags, methodically stacking them by subject, impressed with her Master’s perspicacity as demonstrated by his choices, determinedly ignoring the smears of fresh blood on the fabric of the rucksacks.
Dragging hours became a day, which passed into another, and Hermione existed through those days on nothing but sheer nerve. She was far too upset to eat more than scraps of toast with endless pots of tea, and with courage born of her knowledge of all her professor had endured and all he lived with still, she read through the books he had risked so much to provide for her. When her attention wandered to speculate on his health or well-being, she forced herself back on task with a brutal disregard for her own tender feelings—a tactic which her professor would both recognise and approve. Did he not constantly deny himself and continue on the course he had set, regardless of the consequences to him personally?

So she read the books he had provided, her quill in her fingers as she made notes, subsisting on tea and toast. She permitted herself to dwell on him only when she crawled into her bed, a thick dildo thrusting into her body as she laid herself open to him, reaching for his consciousness with her own. It seemed that she brushed against his mind a time or two, but she received no answering touch of his indomitable spirit, so she brought herself off with his name on her lips and sat up with fingers redolent of her own cunt to write of her orgasms in the journal only he could read.

If desperation drove her to masturbate more frequently and furiously than before, this did not seem odd to her. He wanted her to be a sexual being—he considered it to be part of her over-all health—and if she could not permit herself to worry about him, she could at least give in to her lust for his whipcord thin body dominating hers, his hips between her thighs as he pounded into her, his mouth held in a grimace of combined cruelty and reverence.

On the third day after her receipt of the books from the Hogwarts Library, an unfamiliar owl fluttered at her bedroom window at mid-morning. Jerking to her feet so quickly she upset the teacup at her elbow, she hurried to let the owl in. It waited patiently as she removed the parchment from its leg with trembling fingers, and as she sagged down on the edge of her bed to read, the owl snatched up toast from her breakfast tray and was gone with a sweep of enormous wings.

She noted it was not her professor’s handwriting, even as she began to read.

Hermione,

It’s Maximus here. He is not currently in possession of the journal, thus this note.

He was hit twice—Sectumsempra, if you know of it—but he’s mending. I have no authority with you, but as a friend, I have a plea. You have to stop fighting him about staying out of the line of fire. He
frets over you constantly, and that’s not good. I’ve never seen him this unhinged, and it’s impairing his judgment. For all our sakes, do what he tells you and don’t distract him. There are things only he can do—information the Old Man shares with no one else—and if we have a chance in hell of finishing this thing, we need him focussed.

Otherwise, thank you for all you’ve done—for the friendship you’ve shown—and good luck on your project.

Hermione raced through the missive feeling sick with cold dread. What sort of injury would prevent her professor from writing to her himself? And where was the journal? Had it been left behind at his lodgings when he had gone to Hogwarts to fetch the books? Or had it been taken from him? What if some foul Death Eater had the journal and had worked out the spell to read it—had been reading her graphic sexual adventures? The notion flushed her cheeks with shame, and there was no secret excitement threading through the emotion—only humiliation. For the last two days, she had thought of nothing but Severus Snape, desperately hoping the blood on the rucksack had not been his, and obsessing over masturbation. Now she knew that not only had the written reports of her exploits not been read and enjoyed by the intended recipient, but also that he was suffering from injuries severe enough to prevent him from writing to her.

She crumpled Rafe’s note and let it fall from her fingers, then went into the bathroom and washed her face. No matter what else happened in her life, there was a war going on. People were fighting—people she knew and cared for deeply. Harry! she thought with a stab of real regret that she was not beside him, as she had always meant to be. Still, the warriors in this conflict fought without counting the cost to themselves for the hope of a world untainted by Tom Riddle and his insanity, and their sacrifices would be in vain if she were unable to decipher the spell.

She took up a soft, white hand towel and dried her face, all the while staring at her own reflection in the mirror. She had no control over her Master’s illness—could do nothing to hasten his recovery from the horrible slicing spell—but she could read the books he had risked too much to obtain for her. She could concentrate all of her not inconsiderable skill on the task of translating the ancient spell Harry needed to unmake Voldemort’s body.

With renewed resolve, she returned to her worktable and began to read.

Vi surprised her by coming to her door at suppertime with two steaming bowls of savoury stew and a loaf of warm brown bread.

‘You have to eat more than toast,’ she said, brushing past Hermione and putting the tray on the worktable.

Hermione watched with some bemusement as the blond woman carefully stacked books and parchment to make room for the dishes. She worked with attention to detail, and Hermione had no doubt that her place was marked in the books and her notes were organised logically. Was it possible there was more to Violet than submitting to Claudius and knitting baby things?

‘You don’t have to talk to me, if you’d prefer not,’ Vi said, indicating that Hermione was to sit down
before a bowl of stew and a brimming cup of milk, ‘but Hadrian said I’m to make sure you eat the food, so I may as well eat with you.’

Hermione slid into the indicated chair, her stomach suddenly rumbling in happy anticipation of eating the food. ‘Thank you,’ she said, dipping her spoon into the bowl.

Vi watched her critically for a moment before beginning to eat, as well. ‘Is it a secret, what you’re working on?’

Hermione buttered a slice of the brown bread. ‘It is, rather,’ she admitted.

‘So it isn’t a school assignment that Professor Snape has given you?’ Vi watched her with curious eyes.

‘It’s similar,’ she said. ‘I’m working on an Ancient Runes translation—a spell—and I can’t make it come right. So I’m doing some background reading to see if I can work out why the translation makes no sense.’

Vi’s face became lovely with animation. ‘Ancient Runes was my best subject!’ she enthused. ‘I was pants at Professor Snape’s class, but I was good at Ancient Runes and Arithmancy.’ She gave her head a rueful shake, causing her silky hair to move about her face. ‘I’ve probably forgotten everything I knew.’

Hermione was dumbfounded. She had thought Vi as cold and dry as her Master, Claudius, but Vi wasn’t really indifferent to others—she was simply reserved. ‘Is there anything you can think of that would cause a technically correct translation to read like so much nonsense?’ she asked.

Vi gazed over Hermione’s shoulder as she mulled over the question, the food before her neglected. Hermione continued to eat, the plain, simple fare the perfect fuel for her body after her days of not eating. She wasn’t expecting Vi to tell her anything useful; after all, Vi didn’t seem like the scholarly type, did she? Still, it was polite to repay Vi’s kindness with kindness of her own. If she had learned anything in her years at Hogwarts, it was that it wasn’t necessary to rub everyone’s nose in Hermione Granger’s intellectual superiority—it made some people surprisingly tetchy if she did …

Vi sighed regretfully. ‘The only thing I can think of wasn’t something I learned in Ancient Runes,’ she said. ‘It was something we learned in History of Magic—about how the ancient sorcerers hid magic knowledge from the Muggles.’

Hermione’s hand shot out and grasped Vi’s wrist. ‘Yes!’ she cried, feeling the stubborn memory finally falling into place.

Energised by Hermione’s reaction, Vi sat forward excitedly. ‘They didn’t want the Muggles to be able to read the spells and try to work magic on their own—’

Hermione cut across her and finished the thought, even as she reached for the ancient spell book. ‘So they used rhyming words to disguise the magic spells!’

After watching the bushy-haired girl feverishly scribbling on fresh parchment, consulting first the ancient text on her right, then referring to a lexicon on her left, Vi loaded the dishes back onto the tray and levitated it before her as she left the bedroom. Hermione hadn’t responded to a single word since diving head-first back into the books, so it was undoubtedly best to leave her to it.
Hermione set down her quill and sat back, unconsciously flexing fingers cramped from writing. The parchment laid on the worktable before her, its slightly rough, creamy texture covered with her careful handwriting, line after line, going for two feet or more. She glanced at the window, noting the light showing around the edges of the draperies, and turned in her seat to check the clock behind her; it was just after seven o’clock. She had worked without stopping for over twelve hours, and now the spell was completely translated and written out in her clearest handwriting. There was no way for her to test her work to see if it was right, this time. The ingredients alone made her flesh creep—it appeared that Harry would need Voldemort’s blood, as well as bone from Tom Riddle Senior’s grave to cast this spell. No, it was a piece of magic that would be created one time only, and if it did not work, there would be no second chances.

She rubbed her eyes with the heels of her hands, allowing exhaustion to overtake her. She had to get the spell to Harry and Ron so they could begin the job of gathering the components, but she was far too tired to Apparate. She pushed away from the table and made her way into the bathroom, where her body informed her she had neglected even the call of nature while she struggled through the lexicon to find the proper rhyming words to complete her work. That sorted, she next shed her clothing and let it drop on the bathmat as she ran a steaming bath. Finally, she submerged herself thankfully in the tub.

_He said I was to record the translated spell in my journal_, a nagging voice informed her, disturbing her rest. _He said he’d get it to Harry._

Well, that was before, wasn’t it? That was before she had sent him needlessly into peril, in search of information she had had at her fingertips all along.

And the crushing guilt—_My fault! All my fault!_—oppressed her, and she began to cry, wrenching, hopeless sobs.

She ate the food Pitty brought, and then she slept, but not peacefully. Again and again, her professor fell at her feet, bleeding horribly, while she stood by, helpless to stop it. She awoke after only four hours, wan and haggard, and reached for her journal, hoping against hope that his handwriting would be there, spiky and commanding—but there was nothing.

_He had told her to inscribe the spell in the journal, and he would see that it got to Harry, but now he was hurt and not in possession of the journal. Circumstances were not what he had expected them to be, and it was her fault—all hers._

She was on her own now.
She climbed out of bed and moved to the dressing table, sitting and beginning to brush her unruly hair, staring at her own reflection and thinking. She was submissive, but she wasn’t feeble. She had a very good mind, and it was time to put it to work for the Order.

She bound her hair back in a functional ponytail and walked to her worktable, taking her quill in hand.

Hadrian looked troubled. ‘No, I haven’t heard from him either, Hermione,’ he admitted. ‘I’m sure he’s going to be fine, though—it’s not the first time he’s been out of commission for a bit.’ He patted Hermione’s hand in a fatherly way. ‘Try not to fret over him.’

Claudius paced behind her, a frown marring his handsome face. ‘I’m sure that this translation of yours can wait a few days, until Severus is well enough to deliver it.’

Hermione turned her face to Vi’s Master. ‘I beg your pardon, sir, but what are your loyalties in the war?’

Claudius’ lips tightened into a firm white line. ‘We of Roissy House have no political agenda,’ he said repressively.

Hermione stood. ‘With all due respect, sir, that isn’t strictly true.’

Claudius’ eyes flashed at this, but Hadrian spoke before the other Dominant could reply.

‘Hermione is correct, of course,’ he said gravely. ‘Severus and Rafe are very much a part of Roissy House, and they are committed to the defeat of the Dark Lord.’ He stood and placed his hands on Hermione’s shoulders. ‘Officially, Roissy House takes no stance on political issues—the Switzerland of British wizarding politics, if you like—but privately, all of us in residence here support Severus and Rafe.’

Hermione nodded. ‘Even though it was never said, I knew it was true.’

Hadrian gave her a rueful smile. ‘I know, of course, who you are—I had seen your picture in the newspaper, even before you came here. You’re a close friend of Harry Potter’s.’

Now it was Hermione’s turn to nod soberly. ‘I am—and I have something he needs, Hadrian. Severus was supposed to deliver it, but he’s missing, and I don’t know—’ She paused for a moment, as a lump rose in her throat, and she fought back the tears which threatened. Hadrian squeezed her shoulders sympathetically. ‘I don’t know when or if he’ll be able to do it, so I’m going to try to contact Harry and arrange a meeting.’

‘That’s foolishness!’ Claudius blurted, stepping close to them. Hermione knew he was looking at her, but she refused to meet his eyes—she was too angry. He continued, but the tenor of his words ruined his attempt at persuasion. ‘Surely there’s nothing a schoolgirl can know that the Order of the Phoenix can’t get on without for a while longer!’

Hermione twisted herself from Hadrian’s grasp and folded her arms over her chest. ‘I won’t leave without letting you know,’ she said, then nodded respectfully and departed the Dominant’s Study.
She bumped into Reg in the corridor.

‘Hey,’ he said, reaching out to steady her. ‘Why are you crying?’

Hermione didn’t answer him, but she allowed him to direct her steps to the sitting room, which was empty. She was gently pushed into an armchair and a handkerchief was pressed into her hands.

‘What’s this?’ he asked, sitting on the arm of the chair beside her. ‘Are you in Dutch with Hadrian? Did you get a scolding?’

Hermione shook her head and rubbed at her face with the handkerchief, but before she could answer, Kel entered the room.

‘Hermione?’ Kel said, hurrying over and kneeling before her. ‘What’s wrong?’ Kel patted Hermione’s jeans-clad knee and glared up at Reg. ‘What have you done to her, you bully?’

‘Me?’ Reg protested. ‘I haven’t done a thing but sit her down and give her a hanky. Why do you assume the worst of me, Kay?’

Kel gave Reg a withering look, as if he didn’t deserve an answer, then turned back to Hermione. ‘Do you want me to make him go away?’ she asked softly.

Hermione gave her a watery smile. ‘No, Reg hasn’t done anything. I just had words with Claudius, is all.’

Kel looked alarmed. ‘Oh no!’ she said. ‘What did you do?’

Hermione shrugged. ‘I made the mistake of going into the Study to tell them I might be leaving the house to deliver something to someone, and Claudius was …’ She shrugged again. ‘He doubted that I could possibly have any information that anyone would need for anything.’

Kel made a moue of sympathy. ‘He can be a little bit dismissive of women,’ she admitted.

‘Nonsense!’ Reg said robustly. ‘He’s just concerned for your safety, Hermione—he doesn’t want you to leave the house unaccompanied—and neither does your Master, for that matter.’ He gave her a hard look. ‘Why don’t you tell it to me from the beginning?’ he suggested.

Hermione sat forward a bit. ‘I can’t really talk about it,’ she said. ‘Sorry.’

Kel moved into the chair beside her. ‘Well, we all know you’re doing a special project for Master Severus,’ she said helpfully. ‘Like a school assignment, but not for school.’

Hermione nodded. Apparently, the denizens of Roissy House were more aware of her activities than she had realised. ‘Reg,’ she said, and he down sat on the sofa across from the two submissives with an attentive air. ‘Do you remember when we went to Flourish and Blotts?’

He grinned at her. ‘Am I likely to forget how long it took you to inspect every damn book in the shop?’ he teased.

She ignored this jibe. ‘I finished the project,’ she said. ‘Now I have to deliver the completed product to … someone.’
Reg sat forward, his face suddenly solemn. ‘I’m pretty sure Master Severus means for you to stay put,’ he said in a warning tone.

Kel reached for her hand. ‘I hate to agree with him,’ she said, ‘but I think he’s right. Your Master wants you safe, Hermione.’

Hermione squeezed Kel’s hand thankfully. ‘I know he does,’ she said, ‘but this information has to be delivered as soon as possible. It’s really important.’

‘Hermione,’ Reg said suddenly, ‘let me go with you. Two wands are better than one.’

Hermione looked in surprise into Reg’s candid, earnest face. ‘Thank you for that, Reggie,’ she said, ‘but the fewer people who know what this information is—and to whom it’s being delivered—the better it will be.’

She glanced at Kel and saw her friend gazing at Reggie with open adoration, and she felt a pang of sympathy. It was either antagonism or adoration between these two; there was no middle ground. She smiled and stood to excuse herself; perhaps if she left them alone, they could work out whatever it was that was keeping them apart.

Hermione did her best to nap in the afternoon, but it was difficult to relax. Her confused, uneasy dreams now incorporated Harry and Ron as well as her professor. The owl she had sent to the boys flew endlessly from one end of the country to the other, without ever finding its quarry, and all the while, her Master bled, and bled, and bled. At last, she decided weariness was preferable to the horror of her dreams, and she sat at her worktable, reading through her journal with tenderness in her heart.

She had grown somewhat accustomed to the physical absence of her Master, but she could not accept his complete silence. There was something desperately wrong for him to be unable to even write to her. As the evening light began to fail, she began to write in her journal, praying that her Master would soon be able to read her words.

Dearest Master,

I have completed my assignment, but Maximus tells me that you do not have access to our journal. I do not know when you will have possession of the journal again, nor do I know when you will be well enough to resume your duties. Please know that I love you, that I am thinking of you constantly, and that I pray without ceasing for your full recovery from your injuries. I am going to deliver the completed assignment to its intended recipient. I do not know how long I will be away, but I faithfully promise to be very careful, and I will be back as soon as possible.

With all my heart,

Hermione

She pressed a kiss to the page beneath her signature, wondering if the pale pink of her lipstick would
show on his copy of their journal. Hoping that it would, she put the journal aside and crossed to the
wardrobe, beginning to draw out her warmest clothes.

When Pigwidgeon flapped outside her window, she was wearing thermal underwear, heavy jeans,
last year’s Christmas jumper from Mrs Weasley, and her stout brown boots. She donned her cloak
and opened the window to admit the tiny owl, who fluttered madly about the room, trilling excitedly,
while she read the note in Harry’s boyish scrawl.

I knew you’d do it! We’re ready to receive it. Come to place from which we took the Portkey the
summer of ’94—we’ll be waiting for you.

Hermione set the note alight with the tip of her wand and watched it burn in midair, then Vanished
the ash.

‘Pitty!’ she called.

The house-elf popped into her room.

‘I’m going out, Pitty,’ she said firmly. ‘Please let Master Hadrian know I’ve gone to deliver my
message, and I’ll be back as soon as I can.’

The little creature wrung her hands. ‘No, Miss!’ she cried. ‘Please don’t go!’

But Hermione turned on the spot and was gone.
Hermione arrived on Stoatshead Hill and swayed, only to be grabbed and hugged from either side. She was inundated with the familiar smell of boy, although these two could undoubtedly use a shower, and she wrapped an arm about each of them, standing on tiptoe to kiss each of their cheeks. There was a moment of silence when they simply held one another, hearts full of all the years of shared experiences, and then they were all talking at once.

‘You did it!’

‘It’s so good to see you!’

‘Let’s get out of the open!’

With Ron holding her hand and leading the way, and Harry trailing behind holding the other hand, they made their way down to the bottom of the hill and into the trees. They did not speak as Ron wended his way through the small wood, taking them deeper, until they came to a stop beneath a very old oak tree.

‘Aren’t we really close to the Burrow?’ Hermione asked, sotto voce.

Ron replied in the same low tone. ‘So close it hurts,’ he admitted.

‘Can’t we …?’

‘No,’ Harry said firmly. ‘I won’t take trouble there.’

‘We’ve got it on good authority that my family are under surveillance,’ Ron added. ‘They’re just waiting for Harry to show up there.’

Hermione squeezed their hands sympathetically. ‘I worry about you all the time,’ she admitted.

She could barely make out their faces beneath the overcast night sky, but she could hear the grin in Harry’s voice as he said, ‘We worry about you, too—but look at what you’ve managed on your own!’

Hermione preened at the tone of admiration in his voice.

‘You never would have had the quiet for the study and all you’ve been doing, if you’d been with us,’ Ron said soberly. ‘We’re constantly on the move.’

Hermione opened her mouth to reply, but before she could speak, she heard a whisper of movement. Without thinking, she whirled and cast a non-verbal *Protego!*
In the next breath, bright red streaks of light flew from all sides—they were surrounded! The Stunners thudded uselessly against the Shield Charm, but they couldn’t stay here.

‘Hold on!’ Harry hissed, and the three stepped together neatly into Disapparition.

Hermione blinked as she came to rest in a clearing, where the half-moon illuminated the tent shimmering beneath protective wards. She didn’t recognise the spot, but they were clearly in a different part of the country, for the stars overhead twinkled in a clear sky. But even as she took in these details, Ron uttered a moan at her side, and she turned to see blood gushing from a deep gouge in his left thigh.

‘Splinched!’ he gasped and fell bonelessly to the ground in a dead faint.

‘Ron!’ Harry cried, kneeling beside his fallen friend, but Hermione turned away from them, casting spell after spell, twining her wards with those Harry had already placed on the location, determined to hide them from prying eyes and Detection Spells.

‘Open the tent flap, and I’ll moved him,’ she said steadily, trying not to look at the blood pooling beneath Ron.

Harry scrambled to do her bidding, and Hermione cast *Mobilicorpus*. When Ron’s unconscious form hovered before her, she siphoned blood from his ripped jeans, and then guided him through to the interior of the tent. It was the one they had used at the Triwizard Tournament; it still smelled of cat pee.

She conjured a tarpaulin to spread beneath Ron and lowered him carefully, kneeling swiftly beside him. ‘What potions do you have on hand?’ she asked Harry without looking up from the cleansing spells she was using on Ron’s wound. Determinedly, she put the taunting voice from her mind—the one that reminded her if she’d been with her professor when he went to fetch the books she hadn’t needed after all, *he* might not have been hurt so badly. But at least she would have been there to care for him …

‘Potions?’ Harry repeated stupidly. ‘We don’t have anything on hand …’

Hermione looked up at him, her lips forming an “o” of amazement. ‘You’ve never asked Professor Snape to bring you potions to keep on hand? What if one of you were sick? Or injured?’

Harry shrugged. ‘It hasn’t been high on our list,’ he answered flatly.

Hermione huffed. ‘If I’d been with you, we would have accumulated basic injury care potions,’ she said crossly. ‘Turn your back—I’m going to Transfigure some bandages from my vest.’

Harry turned his back obediently, and Hermione tugged off her Weasley jumper, followed by her white cotton vest with the pink-piped trim. She put the jumper back on, ignoring the scratch of the wool against her bare skin, and Transfigured the vest into a length of bandages.

‘We need to get his jeans off,’ she told Harry. ‘Help me.’

They worked together to slip the ripped jeans down Ron’s long legs, leaving him lying on the tarpaulin wearing on his bottom half decidedly grubby white socks and a pair of Chudley Cannons boxers that had seen better days. ‘I would feel better if we had an Anti-Infection Potion to give him,’
Hermione said, bending Ron’s knee and having Harry hold it in place while she wrapped the bandages about his thigh. ‘And ideally, he should have a Blood Replenishing Potion—but we’ll just hope for the best.’ She finished wrapping and fastened the end of the bandage with a wave of her wand. ‘We’ll watch him tonight,’ she said, as if speaking to herself. ‘If he’s fever-free in the morning, I think he’ll be all right.’

Harry leaned over to give her a hug. ‘I’m glad you were here to manage this,’ he admitted. ‘I could have done it, but it wouldn’t have been easy—and I never would’ve thought of the potions.’

Ron’s eyelids fluttered, and he was looking at them with muzzy blue eyes. ‘Where are we?’ he asked, obviously confused. ‘I’m cold.’

‘Of course you are!’ Hermione exclaimed guiltily. She Summoned a blanket from one of the bunk beds and wrapped tucked it around him. ‘You’ll be all right—just rest, now.’

Ron gave Hermione a sweet, confused smile. ‘I’ve missed you,’ he confided sleepily. Then his brow contracted, and he reached to her throat. Before his fingers touched it, Hermione realised she had forgotten to hide or remove her collar before she left Roissy House. Her face flamed. ‘What’s this?’ he asked. ‘Looks like a dog collar.’

Harry reached over and pushed Hermione’s hair to one side. A frown settled between his brows. ‘Why are you wearing that?’ he demanded suspiciously.

Hermione stood and backed away from them, her cold fingers fumbling at the buckle of the collar. The boys watched her, twin expressions of suspicion in their eyes. She felt the colour leach from her face, and returned their stares, her lips pressed together in a bloodless line. Stuffing the collar in the pocket of her coat, she said, ‘It’s nothing. Never mind.’

Harry stood and walked toward her. ‘But I’ve never seen a dog collar with a shiny silver disk on it—even looked like it might be engraved.’

Hermione shrugged and tried for a light laugh. ‘Well, I can’t expect you lot to be up on all the London fashion trends, can I?’ she said, striving to sound worldly.

Ron struggled into a sitting position, the blanket falling from his chest into his lap. ‘I think I know what sorts have fashions like that, Hermione,’ he said, his voice sounding low and authoritative—when had Ronald begun to sound like Arthur?

‘Oh, I doubt it, Ronald,’ she said lightly. ‘Let’s talk about the spell.’

But Harry wouldn’t let it go. ‘What sorts wear dog collars for a necklace?’ Harry demanded of Ron.

Ron answered Harry, but he did not look away from Hermione. ‘That S & M lot do,’ he said. ‘Charlie told Bill and Perce about it one time, and I listened in.’

‘S & M?’ Harry repeated blankly—disbelievingly. ‘Do you mean those blokes who like whips and chains?’

‘Whips and chains and black leather,’ Ron replied. ‘Just like Hermione’s necklace.’ He said the last word with such contempt that Hermione felt herself cringe in shame. ‘They live together sometimes, in communes, like.’
Harry tore his gaze from Ron and advanced on Hermione, looking sickened. 'Hermione,' he began, but his voice failed him. He stopped a foot away from her, took her hand, and tried again. ‘You’re not living with a bunch of sadists and weirdoes, are you?’

Hermione pulled her hand away from him. ‘Don’t be ridiculous,’ she said testily.

Harry had been on the run for two months, but his Quidditch reflexes were still prime. He lunged and pulled the collar from her coat pocket, turning his back to block her attempts to retrieve it from him as he held it to the oil lamp.

‘SS,’ he read aloud.

‘Let me see,’ Ron said, and Harry strode over to hand it to him, turning puzzled eyes to Hermione.

‘What’s “SS”?’ Harry asked.

‘It’s just a design, Harry,’ she said, hearing the quaver in her voice, as clearly as they did. ‘It doesn’t say anything.’

Ron turned his blue eyes on her. ‘So, do you have some sort of perverted sex with this “SS” person?’ he asked, that mimicry of Arthur’s patriarchal tone resonant in his voice.

Incensed, Hermione darted over and snatched the collar from Ron’s hand, pushing it back into her pocket. ‘Let’s get this clear,’ she said, and she knew she sounded shrill, but she didn’t care. ‘I’ve come here to bring the spell you wanted. I’m prepared to discuss that with you as much as you want.’ She drew herself to her full height, straightened her shoulders, and pinned them with her best imitation of her professor’s derisive sneer. ‘I will not discuss my sex life, or anything else about my private life, with either one of you.’ She looked into Ron’s speculative face, then directly into Harry’s worried green eyes. ‘Do you want the spell or not?’

Harry held his hand out. ‘Let’s see the spell,’ he said resignedly.

Dawn found Harry and Hermione seated together on the floor, practicing over and again the wand movements for the spell she had translated. Ron had fallen asleep on the other side of Hermione, and his cheek was pressed against her leg, where surely the seam of her jeans was leaving a deep imprint.

There was a sound, as of a small bell ringing, and Harry glanced toward the tent flap. ‘Snape,’ he said.

Hermione jerked upright. ‘What?’ she screeched.

Harry produced a gold Galleon from his pocket, and Hermione knew before he spoke what he would say. ‘I used our fake Galleons from the DA,’ he told her. ‘It’s how I can send an emergency message to the old git.’

Cold air blew in, and the visitor stooped to enter, the bright daylight limning his figure with gold. ‘And the “old git” delivers,’ a snarling voice proclaimed.

Hermione stared at him, frozen in place, with Harry sitting so close their arms touched and Ron
sleeping with his head all but in her lap.

‘I might have known,’ Professor Snape said bitterly, and he took another step into the tent, allowing the tent flap to fall closed behind him. Unburdened by the glare of the sun, Hermione got her first good look at him.

He stood as straight as ever, his oily hair hanging in curtains on either side of his narrow face, but that face was pastier than she had ever seen it, greyish in its pallor, and a vivid red slash marred his already ill-favoured countenance. The angry, red scar began at the point of his jawbone on the right, just above the artery, and travelled transverse his features, across his cheek, over the jutting protrusion of the bridge of his nose, and beneath the black silk eye patch he wore over his left eye, before disappearing into his hairline.

‘Sir!’ Hermione cried, and she sprang up, crossing the floor to him and grasping his robes in her fists. ‘Rafe told me you were hurt, but he didn’t tell me—’ Her voice failed, and she stared up at him while he stood immobile, no response to her words or her actions—not even to her presence!—showing in his face or eyes.

With disdainful disregard, he forced her hands from his robes and strode to stand over Harry and Ron. ‘The potions you requested, Potter,’ he said, allowing phials to drop one by one onto the mattress of the bunk bed at Harry’s shoulder. ‘Blood Replenishing, Anti-Infection, and Pain Reliever.’

Harry stood. ‘I didn’t know you’d been hurt,’ he said quietly. ‘I wouldn’t have asked you to come if I’d known.’ His green eyes flicked past Snape to Hermione. ‘Why didn’t you tell me?’

‘I didn’t know you were going to ask him to come here!’ she said, and the tears on her face were her audible in her voice, as well.

Harry watched Hermione with slowly dawning understanding, the he crossed to stand with her, taking her hand gently. ‘I guess you thought you couldn’t tell me,’ he said softly.

Hermione dashed angrily at the tears on her face. Why did she have to cry when she was angry? Her attention was focussed on bringing herself under control, so she was unprepared for Harry to pluck her collar from her pocket one more time.

‘You’re SS, I suppose,’ he said in a musing tone, and the professor turned to glare at him, his thin lips parted, as if prepared to deliver a stinging retort … until he saw the collar in Harry’s hands.

‘What does this mean, Snape?’

Severus Snape walked right up into Harry’s face and snatched the collar from his hand. ‘It means she
is my *property*, Potter. It means you are to keep your filthy hands and your filthy mind *off* of her.’

Harry planted a hand on the professor’s breastbone and gave him a shove. ‘What about *your* filthy mind, you lecherous old pervert?’ he shouted, finally rousing Ron from his sleep, and the ginger-haired boy struggled to his feet, standing staunchly at Harry’s back.

Professor Snape’s hand blurred at his side, and then his wand was trained steadily on the boys. ‘My filthy mind is between Miss Granger and me,’ he purred, almost as if he wanted to provoke the boys to further anger—as if he were longing for a reason to use the wand pointed at Harry’s heart.

‘Stop it!’ Hermione cried, stepping between them and giving Harry and Severus nudges with her outstretched arms. ‘Stop acting like children!’

Her Master thrust his wand up his sleeve and gathered Hermione to him with his wand arm. With the other hand, he reached into his cloak pocket and withdrew a bundle wrapped in moleskin, which he dropped disdainfully at Harry’s feet. ‘The Dark Lord’s blood and a bone from his father’s grave,’ he sneered, and without speaking another word, he wrapped Hermione in his arms and Disapparated.
Hermione was not surprised in the least to find herself standing in their bedroom at Roissy House, in the not quite steady embrace of her pasty professor, who looked horrible and smelled no better. She did not attempt to move away from him, nor did she speak. She stood firm, supporting rather more of his weight than was strictly comfortable for her, and looked up worriedly into his pinched, wan face.

After a moment, his eyes seemed to focus, and his hold on her tightened, even as his free hand spread over her throat. She remained passive in his arms, slightly panicked by the pressure exerted by the hand encompassing her throat, but doing her best not to show it. Her heart continued to hammer in her chest, for she had still not got over the confrontation between her Master and her friends. But truthfully, she had never expected to see him show up in that forest clearing—if she had known he was capable of rising from his sickbed, she would have stayed at Roissy House and let him make the delivery to Harry … or would she? Hadn’t she been longing for an excuse to see Harry and Ron, to feel once again as if she were truly participating in their quest? In satisfying that impulse, she had been disobedient, and she had a feeling her Master would presently express his displeasure.

‘Look at this bare neck,’ he murmured, almost as if to himself. ‘Someone has been careless with her collar.’ His long fingers tightened almost imperceptibly. ‘Do you value your collar so little, I wonder?’

‘No, Master,’ Hermione said softly. ‘I value my collar very highly.’

‘At Hogwarts, you were never to wear it outside my study,’ he said meditatively.

‘And at Roissy House, I was to wear it every minute of every day,’ she supplied, a gentle reminder. He had been the one to take it back from Harry—what if he didn’t return it to her? What if her punishment for going out when he told her to stay in, for showing her collar to non-lifestyle people when she wasn’t supposed to do that, was for him to take her collar back? Her stomach clenched in fear, even as another part of her mind said, That’s not fair! He was hurt! Harry had to have the spell! What was I supposed to do?

‘Now you’ve shown it to your little friends, but they don’t seem very … accepting.’ His lip curled in a fearsome sneer. ‘Do you think I give a fuck what your friends think of me or the choices I make?’

‘Of course I don’t,’ she replied levelly, striving with all her might to sound calm, regardless of the clamour in her mind. ‘I don’t care what they think of either of us or the choices we’ve made,’ she added for good measure, wondering if that were completely true.

‘It does not appear that you care what I think of you either, Hermione.’

She stopped breathing and felt as if her heart had frozen in her chest. ‘No!’ she cried. ‘That’s not true! You’re all I care about!’
‘Silence!’ he snarled, and even in her distress, she saw that he was not well—had he been at full power, that snarl would have been a roar.

He put her from him and sagged into a chair, a trembling hand raised to the patch over his eye. Unmindful of any other consideration, Hermione fell to her knees before him, fully dressed, but nevertheless in the submissive’s pose.

‘I know you will punish me for my disobedience, Master,’ she said to the floor, her eyes deferentially averted, ‘but please allow me to tend to you—to care for your needs. Please let me serve you.’

It took all her resolve to keep her hands on her thighs when she so longed to touch him, to run her hands over his body and make sure there were no other injuries than the terrible one she could see: the slash which had left behind the ugly, raw slice across his face … across his eye. Everything had happened so fast—he had suddenly been there, then been confronted by Harry, and finally whisked her away before she had the leisure to process the ghastly damage to his face.

‘Do you deserve the boon of being permitted to wait on me?’ he asked coldly, and it felt like a slap.

He was weakened by his injury—he had obviously gone out before he was well enough to do so—and by his lights, she had disobeyed a direct order. He was at best, disappointed in her, and at worst … well, she didn’t have to think about that now. All she had to do was convince him to allow her to take care of him, and perhaps she could show him by her actions rather than tell him with the words he was not desirous of hearing how much she cared for him and how important he was to her. She had never been good at this bit—there was a part of her personality that rose up in rebellion at the notion of begging—but he wanted her to abase herself to him now, and if it brought him pleasure, she would do it.

*Think!* she commanded herself. *What would t say?*

‘I do not deserve it, Master,’ she said, hearing Taffy’s soft voice in her mind as she spoke, ‘but I beg that you will permit me to do it anyway.’

She remained where she was, forcing herself to keep her eyes averted, even though she was dying to peek at his face, to see if he was relenting at all. This reminded her forcibly of her times with him in his study when he was unhappy with her, or when he wanted to make a point; the clock on the mantel ticked loudly in the stillness, and she chanted in her mind, *Let me let me let me let me let me* until his voice broke the silence.

‘Strip,’ he ordered her. ‘Then you may run a bath for me and attend me in the bathroom.’

‘Thank you, Master,’ she said, relieved.

‘You do not have permission to speak,’ he replied repressively, but even in his annoyance, he sounded exhausted.

Hermione stripped off her jumper and bra, then pulled off her boots and socks and stood to wriggle out of her jeans and knickers. She went immediately into the bathroom and began to run water into the tub. She heard him rise, and from the corner of her eye, she saw him enter the bathroom and move unsteadily to the sink. As she watched, he looked into the mirror.

‘Oh, Christ,’ he said, and she knew from the desolate, defeated tone of his voice that he had not
previously had a mirror to see the damage to his face.

Tears of pity welled up in her eyes, but she couldn’t take time to grieve now. This time was about
him—not about her—it was her duty to care for his needs and keep her own emotions out of it.

She heard the water in the sink, and the unmistakeable sound of him brushing his teeth. Poor thing!
Had he been somewhere that didn’t provide the basic niceties of hygiene facilities?

Next, she heard him at the toilet, the zip on his trousers, the splash of urine in the bowl with its acrid
odour, and the flush.

‘Undress me,’ he said tiredly.

Hermione rose from the half-filled tub and turned to him. He had left his cloak in the other room, and
beneath its concealing black folds, he had been dressed all by guess, it appeared. He wore an ugly
brown jumper both too long and too large for him, as if he had taken it from Rafe’s cupboard. She
took the hem and lifted it up; he raised his arms and bent at the waist to assist her efforts, as if he
were an over-large child. She allowed the sweater to fall to the floor, and saw the other of his
wounds: a savage slash across his midriff, as if the spell caster had hoped to sever his body in twain.

‘Don’t dawdle,’ he snapped, and her fingers fell to his belt buckle, slipping the leather from the
metal, forcing away her memories of him removing this belt in his study to spank her bottom.

He wore no pants underneath the trousers, and as she knelt to assist him to step out of the trouser
legs, she saw he had no socks, either. Clearly, he had come to the tent from somewhere other than
his own rooms.

He stepped over the pile of clothing, leaving her kneeling form behind him as he climbed over the
edge of the tub. She heard his groan of … pleasure? relief? … as he submerged himself in the water,
and she hurried to him with a flannel in her hand. She longed to wash his face—to make sure that the
cut was as clean as it could be—but she would have to disturb the eye patch, and that would require
speech. She wanted to lull him a bit before she tried to speak to him.

Hermione took up a fresh cake of the lime scented soap he favoured and lathered the face flannel,
then began to wash his chest, well above the slash on his belly. Oh, it felt good to have his skin
beneath her fingertips again, to hear his steady breathing—but seeing him was distressing, for he
looked so unwell. Biting her lip to keep from speaking to him, she washed his arm, taking time over
each of his beautiful, long fingers, and she dipped the hand in the water to rinse the soap off, before
kissing it. His lips parted at the touch of her lips, but he did not speak, and she moved onto the side
of the tub to reach his other arm. She repeated the process, finally rinsing and kissing the newly clean
hand. This time, his good eye opened and he looked at her, stretched across the tub, naked and
slightly chilled, her breasts dangling just above the water, nipples pebbled and taut.

With scarcely a murmur, he pulled her into the water, and she landed with a splash, drenching the
bathmat. He seemed to have no concerns about the bathmat, for he dragged her up and kissed her
mouth, hungry and demanding, his fingers seeking out her nipples to pinch and tweak and twist.
Hermione could scarcely enjoy the sensations, for she was worried that her weight would hurt his
tummy wound, or that she would hurt his face if she brushed against the face wound.

Sensing her reticence, he pulled back from her lips and murmured against the shell of her ear, ‘Am I
too hideous to kiss, little one?’
‘You’re not hideous at all!’ she protested, tucking herself to one side of his long, lean body. ‘I’m just afraid I’m going to hurt you!’ She traced the outline of the slash on his cheek. ‘Have you used any potions on it?’

His good eye closed again, and he held her close to him. ‘We had none immediately available,’ he answered. ‘We couldn’t go back to our lodgings because I was bleeding—it was Rafe’s brothers who attacked us, and they would have known who they had been attacking if we had shown up covered in blood.’ His lips twisted in a grimace. ‘We holed up in a deserted cave in the hills above Hogsmeade for a couple of days—until I got Potter’s important summons.’

Hermione opened her mouth to speak, but he silenced her with another hungry kiss, pulling her against his slick body, turning so that his lengthening cock slid along her skin. Hermione forgot his hurts, forgot his anger, and knew nothing except for his tongue in her mouth, his hands on her body, and his hardening member sliding against her thigh.

‘I need to be inside you,’ he said, his voice suddenly urgent, and Hermione was not proof against his need.

‘Where do you want me?’ she asked, wrapping her fingers around the silk-sheathed iron of his cock.

He growled and thrust into her fist; looking at the eye patch, she thought he looked like a sex-crazed pirate.

‘I want you tied spread-eagle to my bed so I can fuck you through the sheets,’ he said, turning onto his back again and dragging her atop of him, splashing more water onto the floor, ‘but I don’t think I can manage that in my condition.’ He reached between her thighs, encountering her clean shaven pudendum and parting the lips expertly to slip a finger over her clitoris.

Hermione gasped, feeling as if it had been an eternity since last her Master’s fingers had been there.

‘My pet likes to have her pretty petted,’ he observed smugly.

‘Yes,’ she agreed, rubbing herself against the invading digits.

‘Ride my cock,’ he commanded, suddenly all business. ‘Ride me, little slut, and I’ll make you scream.’

She did not think; she only obeyed. She rose on her knees to situate his cock at her entrance, then lowered herself onto him, feeling the thick column filling her as nothing else ever could.

‘Good girl,’ he groaned. He watched her with his good eye half-closed, the black iris glittering in the candlelight, and he set a leisurely pace, his hands at her waist directing her motions. After a moment, his palms trailed up her torso to her breasts, and he proceeded to torment her nipples, gauging her sounds of mingled pain and pleasure to determine his actions. He pinched and twisted, and it made her so hot she could scarcely bear the slow, teasing way his cock moved in and out of her body.

‘Lean forward,’ he told her. ‘Grasp the edge of the tub behind my head. Let me suck and bite your beautiful breasts, little one.’

She angled her body over his and grabbed the edge of the tub, looking down to see her breasts dangling before his face like an offering to the god of her idolatry. In god-like fashion, he took his time with her, lazily drawing the full areola into his mouth and suckling hard enough to make her
uterus contract. Hermione moaned aloud, and he thrust up hard into her quim, drawing a keening cry from her.

‘That’s right, filthy girl,’ he growled, turning his head to ravage the other breast. ‘Use that cock to make yourself come, like the little come slut you are.’

Hermione arched her back, thrusting her breasts more completely into his face and abandoning herself to the sensations he created in her body. It was, she thought muzzily, a combination of shame and erotic frenzy, the intertwining of which was the unbreakable bond with which he held her to him. He grazed her nipple with his teeth, latching onto the soft white under flesh of her breast and suckling hard enough to leave a harsh purple bruise. The sensation excited her, as he was well aware. She stared down at the marks his attentions had left on her breasts, feeling proud of these tokens of his pleasure, and he jerked his hips again, driving himself into her body, the exquisite friction of his flesh in hers causing her to toss her head wildly, sending her hair flying.

‘You belong to me,’ he informed her, as if this were a new development, and she forced her attention to his face, her eyes focussing on him just as his fingertips found her clit again, rubbing it with precise pressure in an inexorable circle. ‘Say it!’ he ordered her. ‘Don’t you dare come before you say it.’

Hermione experienced his fingers on her nerve centre and the delicious thrust of his full length into her cunt, and she felt herself losing concentration, losing the very ability to form words.

‘Say it!’ he thundered, taking her clitoris between his thumb and forefinger and plucking at it as if it were the string of a musical instrument.

‘Yours!’ she cried, abandoning the facility of speech to the delirium he was inducing. As an amorphous cry rose in her throat, he drove himself up into her, his hands closing like vises over her hipbones and forcing her down even as he rose to meet her.

‘Hermione!’ he cried, his own ability to form coherent communication disintegrating with the rush of mutual sensation. Hermione felt herself fragmenting, pieces flying outward against his overweening presence, and his roar of completion erupted from without, blowing inward all his will and insistence, until their beings were reformed, solidified as one, body to body and soul to soul.

They shuddered together, blinking as reality slipped back into the room, almost apologetically. He craned his neck to look down at her as she rested on his shoulder, and taking her chin in his hand, he inquired mildly, ‘Just how did you manage that, my pet, without the aid of Legilimency?’

Hermione felt her naked flesh puckering and pebbling in the quickly cooling bathwater, and she closed her eyes, cuddling closer to his body heat. I have no idea, she confessed, seeing no point in the use of words when they shared one consciousness.
Chapter 63: Erosion

A/N: Someone asked if there was a way I could differentiate between spoken conversation and mental conversation with Severus and Hermione. When their minds are linked, the communication is shown in italics and is non-verbal. Otherwise, their conversation is shown between quotation marks.

For the Potions Master’s Amusement

Chapter 63: Erosion

The connection between their minds continued as they finished washing and dried off. They moved into the bedroom, where he reclined on the clean sheets of the bed, and she felt his pleasure at the comfort, after hiding in the cold, dirty, rocky cave. She exulted to have the link between them; she was never happier than when the bulwark of his consciousness was palpable in her mind.

She went straight to the stash of potions in the wardrobe and sat on the edge of the bed beside him, tilting the Blood Replenishing Potion to his lips.

*I had it before I went to Potter,* he objected.

*You need more,* she coaxed. *Your colour is still very bad.*

He drank, and she took up a different phial, pouring a small amount of dittany on her fingertips. *This won’t hurt,* she promised, bringing her fingertips to the place on his jaw where the cut began.

*It won’t help much either,* he responded, turning his face from her, his eyes already falling closed in exhaustion. *It’s been too long.*

*We’ll see,* she temporised, leaning over him to smooth the tacky liquid up his cheek. As she applied the dittany, she began to sing softly, a chanting Healing Spell she had seen Madam Pomfrey use in the Hogwarts Infirmary, after which she had campaigned to have the matron teach her the incantation. It seemed to her that the angry red of the wound lessened as she applied the potion and chanted with her wand almost touching the torn skin, and so she allowed herself to become lost in the repetition of dabbing the potion on and singing the wound closed, all her considerable power directed to this task.

Time passed; the sun rose higher in the sky outside of Roissy House, and still Hermione worked, pushing her own exhaustion away as if it were of no matter at all. She was conscious of the mind link dissolving when the professor fell into a deep, restful sleep, and she felt the sadness which always visited her when he had been in her mind and then was gone. There was something so strong about his presence—so supportive, like a fortification against which she could rest, or a surrounding stone wall, within whose confines she was safe to do as she would without fear of harm coming to her—that when he withdrew, she felt the loss as a piercing, physical thing.
When she had done all she could for his skin, from his jaw up into his soft, clean hair, she took a deep breath and raised the eye patch. It was evident that the eyelid had been bisected at an angle, but here, there was evidence that someone—Rafe, surely—had made an attempt at healing. The skin was knit back together evenly, though the stark red of the scar stood out on the bluish white skin around his eye. What distressed her was what damage there might be beneath the closed eyelid.

‘I think the cornea is abraded,’ he said quietly, and Hermione realised her professor was awake again. ‘I cannot bear light, and Rafe says the eye is blood red, but I do not believe the sclera was breached.’ He sighed, and one of his long hands stroked down her bare back. His good eye was open, gazing at her, but the injured eye he kept closed. ‘With any luck—and historically, I have not had much—my eyesight will not be impaired, once the healing is complete.’

Hermione breathed a sigh of relief and pressed a kiss to the newly healed skin below his eye, still slick with dittany. ‘I’m so glad,’ she said. ‘I don’t know any healing spells for the eye—I would have been afraid to try to repair damage there.’

He turned his face and chastely kissed her lips, then sighed again with exhaustion. ‘Did you sleep with Potter and Weasley?’

‘I certainly did not!’ Hermione replied, shifting away from him. ‘I can’t believe you asked me that!’

A sneer touched his thin lips. ‘You misunderstand me,’ he informed her. ‘I merely meant to ask if you slept at all last night, or if you were up teaching Potter how to cast the spell until dawn.’

Hermione relaxed again. ‘I didn’t sleep in the tent,’ she said. ‘I spent all the time working with Harry on wand movements.’

He drew her down until her head rested upon his pillow, and he threw the bed covers over her, reaching out with one long, warm leg to trap her legs. ‘Then you will not object to sleeping with me,’ he said, and before she could answer him, he was sleeping again.

Hermione dozed in his embrace, spending long stretches of time looking at his face in the dimly lit room, thankful that he had not been more seriously injured, and determined to keep him with her until he was well enough to go.

She came awake slowly, first smelling delicious food and hearing voices, then opening her eyes, seeing that there was no light edging the heavy draperies—nightfall had come again, then—and finally, looking down the length of the bed into the sitting area, where her professor sat, conversing with Pitty, the house-elf.

‘… questions about your instructions?’ he was saying.

‘No, Master Severus,’ Pitty said, curtseying.

Hermione sat up, clutching the bed clothes to her chest, and though he did not glance at her, she knew he was aware of her wakeful state.

‘You may go,’ he said to the elf, and Pitty popped out of the room.
‘Hello, pet,’ Professor Snape said, turning his face to her.

Hermione took up her wand and lit the room more brightly. He looked better, his colour much improved by the rest, and already, the red of the facial slash was fading. She felt a flush of accomplishment.

‘Hello, Master,’ she said, and throwing off the covers, she padded across to him, bending to kiss his temple. ‘May I go to the bathroom first?’

In the general way of things, she would not have asked for permission to empty her bladder, but she was still a bit on tenterhooks regarding the punishment, which was yet to be discussed. She meant to walk very carefully around him for the duration of the time she had to spend with him before he left again for his work with—and against—Voldemort.

He reached out a long-fingered hand and cupped her pudendum, insinuating his thumb between her labia, applying very slight pressure to the top of her clitoris. Hermione felt the flush of desire low in her tummy but was also aware of the increased need to pee. Would he make her try to hold it while he teased her? What if she couldn’t do it?

He rested his head against the back of the armchair, his long, raven’s wing black hair blending into the fabric of his tight, high-necked jumper, the black silk eye patch giving him a rakish air. ‘Shall I come along to tidy you up?’ he inquired meditatively. ‘We could apply your nipple clamps while you sit on the toilet, and I could massage your clit with oil while you start and stop urinating on command.’

Hermione swallowed, simultaneously repulsed and aroused. How did he do that? It would be humiliating, somehow, to have him crouched at her side while she sat on the toilet, trying to stop her urine flow upon his command, all the while having him rub clever, slick fingers against her aching clitoris … Why would the contemplation of such humiliation make her quim ache with arousal?

His gaze never left her face as she mulled over his offer, but after only a few seconds of her hesitation, he lightly slapped her labia and chuckled. ‘Never mind,’ he said, amusement in his tone. ‘We have other matters to discuss. Off with you.’

When she returned, she knelt at his feet, but he reached at once to her chin and lifted her face.

‘Put something on,’ he said. ‘We’ve got roast beef for dinner, and I’m starving.’

They sat together on the love seat, and both of them made an excellent meal of roast beef, Yorkshire pudding, and roasted sprouts. He drank dark red burgundy with his food, and Hermione was glad to see the added colour in his cheeks and the relaxed line of his shoulders. For pudding, he allowed her to spoon-feed him trifle, which he ate while petting her, stroking her shoulder, smoothing her hair, until she had put the dish aside. Then he spanned her bare throat with his hand and sipped wine.

‘Remove the dressing gown and fetch your collar,’ he told her.

Hermione shed the garment and went to the wardrobe to retrieve her collar from his pocket. She stood for a moment gazing at it, her thumb passing lovingly over the engraved silver disc.

‘Don’t dally,’ he said sharply, and she hurried to him, sinking to her knees before him and placing the collar into his hands before allowing her own to come to rest, palms up, on her thighs.
‘Look at me, Hermione,’ he said, and she did so, her heart beating uncomfortably fast. He held her
gaze for a moment before beginning. ‘You disobeyed a direct, clear order,’ he said.

‘Yes, Master,’ she agreed, hearing her voice as calm and matter-of-fact, at severe odds with her
clamouring emotions.

‘I bade you to remain here, and when Rafe wrote to you, he conveyed the same message to you, did
he not?’ He watched her with the one good eye, his expression grave but not cold.

‘Yes, he did,’ she admitted.

‘Yet you saw fit to disregard this request,’ he stated.

‘Do you want me to tell you why, Master?’ she asked, hoping she wouldn’t make him angry by
varying her answer from simple agreement.

‘No,’ he answered. ‘I feel quite sure I know why you did it.’ He steepled his fingers beneath his
chin. ‘You had struggled with the translation, and time had been weighing on you, for you felt the
urgency of Potter’s need of the spell.’

Hermione nodded minutely. He was looking directly into her eyes, speaking reasonably, almost
doingly.

‘You had a breakthrough and finished the translation all in a rush; you knew I had been injured, that
I was not in possession of our journal, and you felt the onus was on you to make sure Potter received
the spell with no further delay.’

‘Yes!’ she exclaimed, pleased that he understood her thought progression without having it explained
to him. How tired she grew of explaining herself to other people all the time! But her Master was
quick—as quick as she, if not more so—and he never needed to have things explained to him.

‘You feel that all of these things justify your choice to disobey the direct order you had promised to
honour.’

As quickly as it had come, the approbation Hermione had felt melted away, to be replaced by
prickling unease. When phrased like that, her decision to go to Harry didn’t sound very honourable.
Hadhn’t she promised her Master that she would be good, stay safe, relieve his mind of worrying
about her? And had she not strayed almost immediately into a Death Eater ambush? Her face fell,
and she stared down at the floor.

‘Do not look away!’ the professor hissed, and she raised miserable eyes to his face. ‘You have seen
the lengths to which I am prepared to go to keep you out of harm’s way!’ he exclaimed, his calm
falling away as he indicated his scarred face and damaged eye.

His voice continued to rise, and Hermione felt the encounter slipping away into dire, treacherous
territory.

‘Why,’ he demanded, spittle flying from his lips, ‘is it so difficult for you to reciprocate my sacrifice
by giving up your everlasting impulse to careen after Potter from one disaster to the next? You’ve
been doing it since you first walked through the doors of Hogwarts!’

Hermione’s eyes filled with tears of remorse. Why did he twist it all to be about questioning her
loyalty? How could he make it about her caring more for Harry than for him?

His lips twisted into an ugly, bitter snarl. ‘Wearing my collar means that you belong to me, Hermione! To me, not to Harry fucking Potter!’ He held the collar before her face, giving it a shake. ‘He has only to call for you and you’re off, every promise you’ve made to me like so much dust in the wind!’

She cried now, abandoning the pose, raising her hands to her wet face, dashing the tears away. ‘It’s not like that!’ she cried. ‘I love you! You know I do!’

His face hardened, and he stood, moving away from her. He paced to the door, then turned. It was evident to her that he was struggling to contain his anger, to control his emotions. When he spoke again, it was in a flat, emotionless voice.

‘I never asked for your love,’ he said. ‘I have no use for love’ the word spoken like an epithet, contemptuously, ‘where neither loyalty nor honour exist.’

The door was opened, and he swept out, slamming it behind him. Hermione slowly slid to the floor, stretching out between the love seat and the roaring fire, sobbing as if her heart would break.
Chapter 64: Chastisement and Cherishing

She became aware of herself as she was lifted from the floor, first by levitation, then into strong arms, and she subsided against a familiar, dear black jumper with a murmur of contentment. She was laid upon the bed and covered with a blanket, then a cool, damp flannel bathed her cheeks. She opened her eyes and looked into his beloved face, now free of anger and derision.

‘I hope you can forgive me, little one,’ he murmured, bathing the dried tears from her face with infinite gentleness. ‘I behaved in a manner that was both inappropriate to our relationship and undeserved by you.’

Hermione listened to his voice, silky and comforting, but she did not speak.

‘A Dominant should never, ever lose his temper in a discussion of discipline.’ He looked into her eyes, his expression grave, even the black eye patch not detracting from his solemnity. ‘It is unforgivable—yet I ask for your forgiveness.’

Hermione closed her eyes beneath his ministrations and remained thus, content, until the flannel ceased to rub her face. She opened her eyes then, feeling curiously remote, yet content.

Professor Snape watched her with a frown between his brows. ‘What would you like?’ he asked her quietly. ‘You may have what you want.’

Hermione pushed herself into a sitting position. ‘Will you brush my hair?’ she asked, and in a twinkling, she sat between his legs before the fire as he slowly, methodically brushed her hair. Hermione rested a cheek against his leg, feeling the scratchy wool of his trousers, her mind curiously blank. ‘Did you alter my memory?’ she asked after a while.

The brush stilled for a moment, then continued its soothing progress through her unruly hair. ‘No,’ he said. ‘Do you feel as if your memory has been tampered with?’

Hermione shrugged. ‘I just feel … blank.’

The brushing halted, and she heard him place the brush on the table, then his lips were at her ear. ‘May I hold you in my lap?’ he asked.

Hermione climbed willingly onto his lap, and he wrapped her in a blanket, as he had so often done in his study at Hogwarts. She curled up against him, naked against his clothing, and pressed her ear to his chest, listening to the steady—if slightly fast—beating of his heart.

‘You may be having a bit of an emotional withdrawal,’ he said, his voice still calm, but with an
undercurrent she could not identify. Was it uncertainty? ‘It would be a perfectly reasonable response to my earlier behaviour with you.’ She heard him swallow, and when he spoke again, his voice sounded strained. ‘I assume you cried when I left you?’

‘Yes,’ she answered, almost listlessly.

And his arms tightened around her as his nose blazed the trail across her cheek to her ear, followed by his lips. ‘It is … very difficult for me,’ he said in his oddly choked voice, barely above a whisper, ‘to speak of … emotional things. I am sorry, Hermione.’

And she woke up fully, her heart wrenched and brimming with a warm flood of love and forgiveness. ‘It’s all right, Severus,’ she said, shifting so that she could embrace him, her face buried against his neck. ‘I forgive you. People say things they don’t mean when they row.’

Again, she heard the audible swallow, and his face moved from side to side, pressed into her freshly brushed hair. ‘That’s the problem,’ he said. ‘Dominants do not row with their submissives. It is a very serious breach of proper behaviour.’

She leaned back now, her palms cupping either side of his too-thin, narrow face. When she touched him, his eyes closed, as if in relief, and he pressed his face to one side, moving slightly against her hand, like a cat being stroked. Hermione said, ‘But people do, Severus. Lovers quarrel—boyfriends and girlfriends quarrel—husbands and wives quarrel—didn’t your parents?’

There was a long moment when he did not speak, when he seemed to be seeing beyond her—perhaps beyond the walls of Roissy House—then he returned his gaze to her face. ‘I have no experience with any of those things,’ he said awkwardly. ‘I make mistakes with you I have never come close to making before.’

He shifted, putting his hand into his pocket and withdrawing her collar. She moved to accommodate him, a sudden spark of hope flaring to life in her chest.

‘It is all of a piece, I believe,’ he said musingly. ‘I also have never offered my collar to a submissive, so obviously, our connection runs deeply.’

Hermione nodded, not wishing to break his train of thought. It came to her that he had turned to his mentor, Hadrian, to discuss the dilemma of their contretemps, and it was the products of that discussion she was hearing now.

He placed a hand beneath her hair and leaned forward to kiss her mouth. He was gentle in this kiss, tender and giving. When he ended the kiss, he pressed his forehead to hers, then held up the black leather strip which symbolised their relationship.

‘May I return this to its proper place?’ he asked quietly.

‘Please,’ she answered, and she was quite sure she saw a flash of relief before he secured the collar around the column of her throat. When it was in place, he pressed his lips to it, then kissed her mouth again, more hungrily than he had before, the dominance of his nature rising inexorably to the fore. He buried a fist in the hair at her nape and held her where he wanted her as he claimed her mouth for his own, his tongue quick and clever against hers.

At last he released her mouth, pulling back and regarding her slightly swollen lips with some satisfaction. Then he transferred her gently to the cushion beside him, tucking her blanket around her
as he turned a bit so that he faced her. ‘We have still to speak of your punishment,’ he said.

Hermione tried not to let her disappointment show in her face. Had not crying herself to sleep been punishment enough? But she did not speak, simply nodded once.

‘Before my regrettable loss of control,’ he said, ‘your punishment would have consisted of two parts, one private and one public.’

Public? How had she publicly disobeyed him? But the answer came to her almost before the question was fully formed in her mind. She had told Pitty when she left to go to Harry; Pitty would have immediately informed Hadrian and Elinore. It would be very odd, really, if everyone in the house was not aware of how she had disobeyed her Master’s command. She had defied him publicly. The thought made her feel sad and penitent.

‘I’m sorry, Master,’ she said, meaning it.

‘I have always enjoyed watching the emotions parade across your face, pet,’ he said, his voice low and intimate, and when she reached for his hand, he clasped hers warmly. ‘I feel that after my behaviour with you tonight, we can dispense with the public punishment. That leaves us with the private one.’

Hermione tightened her hold on his hand but did not speak.

‘Your punishment will be this, Hermione: You are forbidden to leave Roissy House without express permission from me until further notice.’

Hermione felt her mouth drop open in horrified dismay, and she jerked her hand from him, but before she could speak, he laid his forefinger across her lips.

‘The only exception to this rule is that you may visit at St Mungo’s,’ he continued. ‘She is expected to remain in custody there for another ten days or so.’

‘She’s not in custody!’ Hermione objected. ‘She’s a patient there!’

A sly smile touched his lips. ‘Try telling her that,’ he suggested.

‘But you’re going to make me a prisoner here!’ she blurted.

He looked around the room at the rich furnishings and indicated the remains of the lavish meal still on the low table. ‘All of this and house-elves to do your bidding,’ he said sardonically. ‘I scarcely think the inmates at Azkaban would find your position at Roissy House to be onerous in the least.’

Hermione huffed. ‘It’s barbarous.’

‘The wards of the house have already been set in compliance with your punishment,’ he continued, as if she had not spoken. ‘There is an Anti-Disapparition Jinx keyed only to you. In addition, your housemates, as well as the house-elves, have been informed you are not to leave the house.’

Hermione felt her cheeks flame. Here was a whole different sort of mortification, and she found she did not relish it in the least. ‘It’s humiliating!’ she blurted. ‘You’ve made me ridiculous to everyone in the house!’
He looked suddenly stern. ‘And how have you made me appear to everyone in the house, Hermione?’

Oh.

She lowered her gaze to her hands, clasped now in her lap, and bit her lip. In its way, her punishment was both public and private.

‘Look at me,’ he said, his voice so soft she would not have heard him had she been sitting any farther from him than she was.

Hermione raised her face, making no effort to dispel the unhappy expression there.

‘I require you to verbally accept your punishment, Hermione—and then, you must submit to Legilimency. I must be sure of your intention to obey.’

She raised her chin. ‘I loathe the idea of being confined to this house!’ she said. ‘What if there’s an earthquake? Or a fire?’

He regarded her patiently. ‘In the event of a fire, flood, earthquake, or other natural disaster, you have permission to leave the house, and no one will prevent you from doing so.’

‘I’ll be able to Disapparate?’ she persisted.

‘Yes, in the event of a fire or other dire emergency, wherein the house is no longer safe, all wards drop. You’ll be able to Disapparate.’

Hermione stood up suddenly, distressed. ‘How can you ask this of me?’

He watched her, unperturbed. ‘You have not proven yourself willing to take reasonable precautions to protect yourself. I am your Master, and your well-being is my responsibility.’ He shrugged, as if that explained it all.

Hermione turned her back on him and paced across to the door, a tumult of emotions roiling in her breast. She felt as if he were burying her alive—as if she would never breathe freely again if he restricted her this way.

After a moment, he stood and crossed to her, turning her to face him.

‘I am your Master,’ he said again, ‘and I find that I do not care to contemplate a future without you in it.’ He looked no less stern—she knew that he would never back down from this punishment, no matter how she protested—but there was something else in his expression, as well. It was akin to tenderness but seemed to go even deeper. ‘Tell me that you accept your punishment, Hermione.’

Was he expressing emotion? Trying to say something without actually saying it? She stared up into his face, and something in his glittering black eye made her believe it was so. How could she deny him something so small, when he gave everything he had to the greater good every single day?

She breathed in slowly. ‘I accept my punishment, Master,’ she said, and in that instant, he was in her mind, immersed in her thoughts and emotions.

She felt him there, and then he was gone.
'Good girl,' he murmured as he broke eye contact and gathered her into his arms. ‘I know you will obey my wishes, in both the letter and the spirit of the request.’ After a moment, he continued, ‘Now, I must be away by morning, and I would like to spend the hours left to us in a mutually agreeable fashion—would that be acceptable to you?’

She was naked, bound hand and foot to the St Andrew’s Cross in the dungeon. The silk of a handkerchief covered her eyes, and although she knew he was in the room with her, Professor Snape moved about with such stealth that she could not place him. Every so often, his fingertips trailed down her torso, fingered her quim, or pinched a nipple—but then he moved away from her again, and she was straining every nerve to locate him, to feel him. Never mind his earlier harsh words to her—she recognised jealousy when she saw it—and never mind the harsh punishment she would endure. What mattered most was that he was going away in mere hours, and she had no clue of when he would come back to her again. It could be mere days, or it could be weeks—months, even. Harry had the spell now, it was true, and once he was sure he could perform it properly, he could force a final confrontation with Voldemort—but when would that be? And would her professor return safely to her, when all was done?

‘My pet,’ he purred, and he stepped into her, one hand grasping her arse cheek, one hand kneading her breast, and his lips at her throat, sucking, licking, biting. He ground himself against her, and she could feel him, rigid, through his trousers. ‘I’m going to flog you now—are you ready?’

‘Yesss,’ she breathed, and he groaned his approval, his lips finding hers, his tongue invading her mouth. The hand at her breast trailed down to her quim, and he expertly parted her labia before penetrating her opening.

‘Your cunt is wet for me,’ he murmured. ‘You want my cock in it, don’t you, little slut?’

‘I do!’ she cried, but he pulled away from her, leaving her bereft.

‘Shall I call everyone down to watch me flog you?’ he asked from several feet away.

Hermione pulled against her bindings, slightly panicked. ‘No! Please, no, Master!’ she cried. She knew he would not do it—he had told her they would have the Dungeon to themselves tonight—but there was something so erotic about the threat of being watched … and of begging him not to permit it. She didn’t know why those things aroused her, but they did; there was no denying it.

‘Now the flogger, little one,’ he said, and the leather strands thudded against her upper thighs.

‘Ahh!’ she cried, arching into the touch, her nerve endings reporting the pain, her brain and her cunt translating it to pleasure. How long it had been since she had been bound and disciplined in this way —how she had missed it!

The flogger landed again, this time just below her breasts, stinging, flaying the very defiance from her spirit.

‘Yield to me, Hermione,’ he ordered, the habit of command so ingrained in him—and her habit of complying so fixed—that she felt herself slip her moorings, as if her consciousness would follow him into the ether, where subspace waited for her.
‘Master, yes!’

And the flogger landed again and again, smacking her belly, stinging her breasts. He went no higher, for there would be danger of hitting her face, but he worked his way then back down her body, never hitting the same place twice in a row, until her body sang with sensation.

The he was before her; she felt his heat, and his hands reached for her blindfold, untying it and allowing it to fall unheeded to the floor.

She blinked once in the bright light, then focused on him. He was magnificent, exotically dashing with the eye patch, wearing an unfamiliar white lawn shirt with billowing sleeves gathered at the wrists and a froth of ruffles flowing down the front—a pirate shirt! His hair was wet with sweat, and she could smell it on him, along with the testosterone rolling from him like steam, enveloping her, making her ache to have him in her body, completing the act for which their complementary parts had been created.

‘My God, little one,’ he said roughly, his hands now busy freeing her wrists, ‘you are so beautiful when you beg me to hurt you.’

He paused to ravage her mouth, ending the encounter with a nip at her lower lip, then he was kneeling at her feet, releasing her ankles from bondage. She looked down at his hanging black hair as he finished untying her leg, then he lifted his face, gazing up her body into her eyes, and his rapier-like tongue darted from his mouth and into her quim.

Hermione shuddered her pleasure, glad of the wooden structure at her back, for without it, she was sure she would have fallen. He lapped at her slick cunt like a man starving for the juice of her quim, his glittering black eye fixed on her face, the piratical eye patch and flowing pirate’s shirt adding to the illusion of being ravaged by a romance novel buccaneer. His hands held her hips, but he did not touch her quim with his fingers; he did all the necessary work, finishing up the job the flogger had begun, with his lips, tongue, and sweet Nimüe—his teeth!

And in one or two brilliant instances, even with his impressive nose.

There was screaming, a ululating sound that bounced off the walls and reverberated in the room, but it wasn’t until Hermione sagged limply into her Master’s arms that she realised she had been one creating the cacophony.

‘Perfect pet,’ he murmured into her hair and lifted her up. It was the air moving against her overheated skin that told her he was walking across the floor with her.

Hermione clung to him, her lips moving over his sweat-slick throat, until he settled her on a slightly raised platform beside a black leather-padded bench with a table-like ledge protruding from the top.

‘On your knees, with your wrists on the surface, little one,’ he said, and though his voice was soft, there was a compelling inflexibility in his tone. Declining to do as she was told was not an option.

With her body still humming from the stupendous orgasm he had given her, she forced her trembling legs to support her as she crawled onto the bench, where she knelt, while she rested her upper body on the table surface.

‘Stretch out your arms,’ he instructed, and when she did, clamps encased her wrists, securing her in
place. ‘Good girl,’ he breathed, and when he bent over her to kiss her temple, she felt his bare chest against her back. Now he was naked, as well.

‘I’ve attended to your front side, pet,’ he crooned, positioning himself behind her, so that she felt the unmistakable protrusion of his erection between her thighs, ‘and now I’m going to take care of the back side, as well.’ He leaned forward, sliding the head of his cock through her slick folds, rubbing her clitoris and drawing a guttural moan from her throat. ‘Ask me to spank your bottom,’ he instructed her.

And though her nerve endings still sang from the treatment she had already received from him, her very womb contracted in desire. ‘Please, Master!’ she cried, pushing back against his hardness, hoping it would slip into her cunt, and he would fuck her hard. ‘Please, spank my bottom!’

And he met her desires, both the one spoken and the one unspoken, for he pushed his cock into her aching cunt, and as he sucked her, he slapped her arse.

‘Filthy, slutty little girl,’ he said, ‘what should I do with you?’

But the question was purely rhetorical, for already, he was doing it, spanking and fucking, fucking and spanking. Hermione was beyond herself, lost in subspace, incapable of answering him had he required an answer.

Then he ceased to spank her and began to fuck her in earnest, grasping her hips with strong hands, jerking her back and thrusting forward with such force that their slick skin slapped together, echoing about the large, empty room, quiet now save for Hermione’s whimpering exhalations of breath at the impact of every thrust, and the ever more laboured breathing of her Master.

‘Mine,’ he growled, his heavy scrotum slapping hard against Hermione’s labia.

She cried out ‘More!’, unthinking, a being of only sensation—a being within a breath of her second earth-shattering climax in the space of mere minutes—a being too far gone in the shared experience to consider the niceties.

‘Mine!’ he shouted again, thrusting harder, and the impact sent her skittering over the edge, screaming his name over and over again, feeling the aftershocks rippling through her body even as his cooling seed dribbled down her inner thighs. He spoke the command to release her wrists, freeing her and pulling her up, turning her around to kiss her lips.

Hermione was too shattered to do aught but cling and cry, and he petted and praised her. ‘You were magnificent, my precious,’ he assured her. ‘You were the best of good girls.’ He sagged into a nearby sofa and pulled her down with him, rocking her against his chest as she floated down, out of subspace. ‘You pleased me, little one—so much.’

And she quieted in his arms, gentled as an animal trainer would quiet a wild beast, feeling as if she had been dismantled and remade beneath his careful tuition and instruction, loving him with every cell of her body and every fibre of her being.

She stirred when he kissed her mouth, chastely and reverently.
‘Severus?’ she whispered, displaced and disoriented. How had she come to be in their bed, sleeping? Why was he showered and dressed, smelling of his aftershave and tasting of goodbye?

‘You fell asleep in my arms downstairs,’ he told her, smoothing hair from her face. ‘You had quite a workout tonight, both emotionally and physically. I let you sleep.’

She pressed her cheek into his hand, emotion billowing painfully in her chest, making it hard for her to breathe.

‘I’ll have the journal again by nightfall,’ he murmured against her lips. ‘It is unlikely that we will meet like this again before Potter makes his attempt. Events are set in train—we are coming to the end, for good or ill.’

Her arms wrapped around his neck. ‘No!’ she cried. ‘No, I’m not ready for you to go!’

He unwound her arms, kissed the palm of each hand, and held the hands down upon her chest.

‘You’re my reason,’ he whispered, kissing her lips again. ‘You’re my home.’

Tears filled her eyes and fell upon her cheeks; she could taste their salt in the sweetness of his kiss.

‘Be my good girl,’ he adjured her.

‘I love you!’ she whispered, but he was already gone.
The days that followed were formless and tasteless, as if all savour had been removed from her life. She missed him—she always missed him, both in body and in spirit, for though he was lean and hard inside and outside, he was still the perfect cradle for her body and her soul, her deepest self. But she also missed her purpose, her quest. Her assignment was complete; Harry had in his possession exactly the tools he needed to defeat Voldemort—hopefully!—and now Hermione had nothing to do, save study for her NEWTs.

Yet for all her vaunted bookishness, she found her concentration severely wanting. The people whom she loved most dearly in all the world were far away from her, carrying out the work she had been part of almost since the first moment she had known she was a witch, yet she was … uninvolved. She was, in fact, banished to this mansion in Grosvenor Square, London, cooling her heels—as good as a prisoner. She tried not to dwell on the truth of her house arrest too much, but it played a large part in her dreams, which were troubled with helplessness and plagued her with an ever-present sense of oppression, as if she could not draw in a deep enough breath.

So she fell into a routine, and after a while, she began to find comfort there. She was up each morning for breakfast, and after she ate, she accompanied one of her housemates to visit at St Mungo’s. Taffy had indeed grown irritable, weary of bed rest, but she was almost pathetically grateful for the company when her friends arrived, and she happily knitted and gossiped about all the doings at Roissy House and in the hospital.

‘It’s party weekend,’ t said to Hermione on Thursday morning as they knitted tiny socks. ‘What are you going to wear?’

Hermione dropped a stitch and cursed under her breath. ‘I don’t know,’ she said, correcting her mistake. ‘I haven’t thought about it.’

Kell set aside her own badly knit cap and dug in her handbag for a piece of chewing gum. ‘She’s been a bit depressed ever since Master Severus’ last visit,’ Kell reported shrewdly. ‘And who could blame her?’

Taffy leaned over to touch Hermione’s hand. ‘I’m sure they’re all right,’ she said.

Hermione looked up with a quick smile. Taffy’s fair hair was plaited, a look which made her appear years younger than her actual age, and her eyes were shadowed. Hermione took t’s hand and gave it a quick squeeze. ‘I just miss him,’ she said. ‘You know how that feels.’

Taffy nodded sympathetically. ‘But at least we got to see them for a bit last weekend,’ she said.
Hermione nodded. Rafe had been to visit at the hospital when Severus had been at Roissy House. She sat a bit straighter and took up her knitting again. ‘I’m sure they’re fine,’ she said, trying to sound surer than she felt.

‘There!’ Vi said, putting the last touch on the blanket she had been knitting.

The other girls admired the soft yellow blanket, and Vi stood to cross to the dresser against the wall, where the completed and folded pieces of the layette were arrayed. Vi placed the newly finished blanket on the top of a small stack of similar items and pursed her lips. ‘This is going to be the best outfitted baby in all of wizarding Britain,’ she said. ‘But it may be time to move on from knitting to sewing.’

‘Oh, I’m even worse at sewing than at knitting!’ Kell lamented, looking dismally at the misshapen cap on her lap.

Taffy laughed, and at the sound, Hermione felt her heart lighten. For all the time she had spent hating ‘Miss Smith’ and being suspicious of her, since they had become friends, she had found t to be a very comforting presence in her life. The other girl had a sweetness of spirit that soothed and calmed her.

‘Well, we’ll just have to start making things for your babies!’ t said cheerfully.

Kell’s mouth dropped open. ‘You’re the pregnant one!’ she said. ‘None of us have babies!’

Taffy looked about at her friend’s faces. ‘But you want babies, don’t you? I know you do, Vi,’ she said, and Vi nodded once and looked away.

‘And Kell? Don’t you want to have a sweet wee one?’ t cajoled.

Kell looked uncomfortable. ‘Someday, yeah,’ she said. ‘But I can’t even get the Dominant thing straight in my head yet, so babies are the last thing on my mind.’

‘But Master David is coming back this weekend, isn’t he?’ Hermione said, watching Kell’s face curiously.

‘Oh, I like him!’ t enthused. ‘Are you going to accept him, Kell?’

Vi moved across the room and stopped behind Kell, laying a hand on the younger girl’s shoulder. ‘Kelly and Master David are still becoming acquainted with one another,’ she said quietly. ‘There’s no hurry to make a decision.’

Kell looked up at Vi, and Hermione was sure she saw both surprise and gratitude in Kell’s expression. ‘I like him a lot, too,’ Kell admitted. ‘But I’m just not completely sure about him, yet.’

Taffy sighed. ‘I remember when I knew I wanted to belong to my Master,’ she said. ‘There’s nothing sweeter.’

‘Or more desperate,’ Hermione added, drawing all eyes to her.

‘I agree,’ Vi said.

Kell bit her lip and looked down, and Hermione’s heart ached for her friend.
On Friday night, Hermione dressed in the red cocktail dress her Master had provided for the Valentine’s Day weekend and went down to dinner with a determined smile on her lips. It had been a relief this week to be able to communicate again with her professor through the journal, though his replies had been very brief, until tonight.

_ little one,

_Wear your Gryffindor red dress, paint your pretty lips to match, and go amongst the D/s community with your head held high, knowing that you are very much on my mind tonight and that I am with you in spirit. Do not climax tonight; instead, write to me of everything you observe at the dinner dance. You will receive further instructions for tomorrow.

_Your Master,

_SS

She held his words to her like an extra layer of clothing, feeling him at her side as she mingled with the guests and exchanged pleasantries. For some reason, Reg stayed near her.

‘Have you been assigned to watch me?’ she asked as he slipped into the seat beside her at dinner.

He snorted impolitely. ‘No,’ he replied shortly, bending his dark, curly head over the soup.

Yet he trailed her to the large receiving room after dinner, where the orchestra played and the people danced. In a shadowed corner, there was a freckled, ginger-haired Dominant who reminded Hermione forcibly of Ron, busily sucking the nipples of a large-breasted woman through her very thin evening dress—but otherwise, they might have been at a Ministry Gala.

‘Will you dance with me?’ Reg asked tersely, and Hermione went with him willingly, wanting the evening to pass quickly. Being here without her Master made her miss him deeply, and although most of the people were behaving with perfect decorum, she could feel the strong sexual undercurrent in the room, and it made her quim ache. She did her best to keep her eyes from straying to the couple groping in the corner, but it was difficult not to watch them.

‘I wonder what Hadrian will do if those two get after it right here on the floor?’ Reg mused, and Hermione saw that the woman’s breasts were now exposed, her halter top untied and hanging about her waist as the ginger-haired man continued to ravage her nipples.

‘Don’t talk about it,’ Hermione said, turning her eyes resolutely away, trying to ignore the way her nipples had puckered against the fabric of her red dress, longing for her Master’s cruel, clever fingers.

‘Right you are,’ Reggie replied, and they danced slowly to the other end of the room, away from the couple whose activities were drawing a bit of a crowd of observers. Then Reg’s good-natured tone
hardened, and Hermione followed his gaze as he spoke. ‘Why watch the nipple-sucking wonder when we can just watch that great git grope our Kell?’

Kell and her big Quidditch player were in a clinch near the orchestra dais, their arms tightly wrapped about each other, Master David with his lips at Kell’s ear.

‘If you don’t want to see her dance with him, why don’t you ask her?’ Hermione asked, her tone one of exaggerated patience, as if she were speaking to someone who was not quite bright. ‘She isn’t likely to ask you, is she? I mean, Claudius has rules against that, right?’

Reggie pulled back slightly and stared down into her face. ‘What do you know about that?’ he demanded.

‘Only what you told me my first night here,’ she answered. ‘Back then, she wasn’t allowed to be in a room with you unless Claudius was present.’

Reg’s lips twisted into a rueful smile. ‘Yeah, I remember.’

The dance ended, and he began to lead her toward the chairs around the walls of the room. Hermione glanced around and saw Master David in conversation with two Dominants whose names Hermione could not remember. Kell looked a bit at a loss, and Hermione dug her elbow into Reggie’s side.

‘Go!’ she said, jerking her head in Kell’s direction. ‘Ask her now—he’s ignoring her!’

Reg gave Hermione a look of mixed hope and exasperation. ‘You’ll be the death of me.’

Hermione chuckled to herself as he strode off in Kell’s direction. ‘I’ll be the making of you, silly git,’ she murmured to herself.

The next day seemed to drag, and she avoided the dining room downstairs, not really wanting to socialise with the guests. She spent the morning trying to revise, then gave up and spent the afternoon reading for pleasure. *The Story of O* and the doings at the real Roissy house held her spellbound and made her miss her Master keenly. She regularly checked her journal for her Master’s handwriting, and at mid-afternoon, she finally saw it.

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little one,

*Your report of last evening’s activities was well done. These are your instructions for tonight: Wear your black negligee and observe in the Dungeon. You are permitted to come as many times as you wish—IN the Dungeon. I don’t mind who watches you, or if you prefer to hide in one of the darkened alcoves to touch your hot clit, just keep in mind that no one is permitted to touch you while you masturbate. You are required to come at least once in the Dungeon, but there are no limits on how many times you can orgasm. When you have completed your assignment, go to our room, and without washing yourself, take up your quill and write to me of your experiences. I will await your report, my own.*

*Your Master,*
Hermione stared down at his imperative, spiking script. She had to come in the Dungeon? She began to twirl a hank of hair about her forefinger. What if she couldn’t? What if she couldn’t get up the courage to touch herself amongst all those people? Or what if she did find the wherewithal to masturbate in public and couldn’t orgasm?

She rose from her chair with a sigh and walked into the bathroom. Life with him was never going to be either simple or comfortable. If she ever became comfortable, it would be his job to challenge her—to push her limits. Well, this assignment would definitely push her limits—and if she was going to be flashing the play-party attendees tonight, she had best see about removing unwanted body hair.

She didn’t go downstairs until well after dinner. She had been mildly tempted to stay in her room, but she knew she couldn’t bear to disappoint her professor again. So she applied her make-up and gave her hair a good brushing and tried not to look at herself below her chin.

Vi approached her when she reached the ground floor. The blond woman was lovely in a sheer, silvery cat suit which concealed nothing of her body. She wore ridiculously high-heeled silver shoes, and her hair flowed about her shoulders like silk.

‘You’re so pretty!’ Hermione said impulsively.

Vi paused as if surprised by the compliment, then smiled sweetly. ‘You’re kind to say so,’ she said softly, glancing to one side, as if to make sure they would not be overheard. ‘Master loves me in this, but I feel so … fat.’

Hermione chuckled. ‘No worries there!’

Vi stepped closer. ‘Are you all right? Hadrian was about to send me up to find you.’

‘I’m fine,’ Hermione said. ‘I just have an assignment tonight, and I’m a bit embarrassed by it.’

Vi nodded sympathetically. ‘Do you want to tell me what it is?’

Hermione blushed and shook her head. ‘No, thanks.’

Vi smiled and patted her shoulder. ‘Just remember that whatever it is, every submissive in the room has probably had to do the same thing, or something like it, so no one will be thinking badly of you for it.’

Hermione looked up, a sudden smile spreading across her face. ‘I didn’t think of it that way!’ she said excitedly. ‘You’re right!’ She gave Vi a quick hug, being careful where she put her hands. ‘Thank you!’

The doorkeeper allowed Hermione into the Dungeon, and as she descended, she looked about for
familiar faces. The St Andrew’s Cross was empty as she passed it, but there was a crowd gathered about farther into the room. She could see slender white arms bound at the wrists and secured to a heavy silver hook which hung from the ceiling on a chain. An ebony haired woman who appeared to be about Professor Snape’s age luxuriated—there was no other word for it—beneath the lash of a whip.

Hermione approached the circle, and realised why there was such a huge open area—because the black-shirted Dominant, who wore a jaunty yellow silk scarf tied about his forehead to absorb sweat and to keep his hair out of his face, needed the clear area to manoeuvre about the submissive with the four-foot long whip in his hands.

Hermione eased around the edge of the group, trying to find a vantage point from which she could watch. She had seen someone use a whip on her first visit to the Dungeon, and her professor had made it clear to her that mastery of the single-tail whip required hours and hours of practice. He said that he had never possessed the patience to acquire the skill, though he knew a number of Dominants whom he would judge to be experts. Hermione had felt surprised to learn there was something about discipline implements Severus Snape was not the master of—and she had also been just a touch disappointed, for watching the whipping had aroused her.

She saw that there was a physical perimeter, created by the simple use of folding chairs, which had been placed around the area in which the Dominant moved, bringing the whip over his head with a resounding crack, then striking the submissive’s back, drawing a moan from her and a murmur of approval from the crowd. There was one section missing a chair, making a passage through which the circle could be entered and exited. Standing at the opening was Kell, pretty in her green suspender belt and silky stockings, with her party weekend feather in her dark hair. Kell watched the demonstration raptly, almost as if she weren’t breathing, and standing behind her with his arms crossed over his broad chest was Master David. Just behind the couple stood Claudius, watching the players with professional interest, and when he caught sight of Hermione, she was surprised to see his face relax into a very slight smile.

‘We were wondering if you would come down,’ he said to her. ‘Good girl!’

Hermione couldn’t help but grin at this praise, which her Master used with her to good effect—but it just wasn’t the same, coming from Vi’s Master. Claudius had always seemed so cold to her, but so had Vi, and she was coming to know Vi had a very sweet, quiet nature. Perhaps Claudius was nice as well … deep, deep inside.

He gestured to the whipping demonstration. ‘Did you want to watch? Come, stand in front of me, where you can see properly.’

‘Yes, thank you,’ she replied, and she slipped past Claudius to a clear view of the man and the woman in the circle. She was disappointed to see that the demonstration had just that moment ended, for the man with the yellow scarf released the submissive from her bindings and handed her over to a waiting Dominant. The Dominant received his woman into his arms and carried her past Hermione, murmuring praise into her ear.

‘Who’s next?’ a cheerful voice demanded, and Hermione was shocked to realise she knew the expert whip wielder—it was Reggie!

‘Reg!’ she breathed, completely dumbfounded. Who would have thought Reggie Bardulph, who seemed so lazy in his practice of D/s, would have put in the hours of continual practice necessary to make him an expert in this area?
‘I was surprised he volunteered to demonstrate tonight,’ Claudius said in a musing, conversational tone, whilst Reg drank a tall glass of water and bantered with the crowd. ‘He hasn’t had much heart for it since …’

Hermione looked up quickly, but Claudius’ gaze slid away from her face, and he finished, ‘He hasn’t been interested in public play for quite some time.’

Reg Vanished the glass from which he’d been drinking and stepped closer to the chairs forming the protective barricade. From the one just in front of Kell, he picked up a clean white towel and dried his sweaty face.

‘How about you?’ he said to her, his tone low, intimate, and Kell’s face flushed pink. ‘As I recall, you had quite a fondness for my whip, Kay.’

Hermione felt like a voyeur watching this interchange, more of an intruder on their privacy than she had felt watching outright sexual acts in this room. As Hermione watched, Kell glanced over her shoulder, and though Master David opened his mouth to speak, it was Claudius to whom Kell was looking for permission.

There was a beat of silence, as Claudius looked Reg up and down, and then his cool blue gaze returned to his trainee, and for the first time, Hermione saw something approaching affection pass between Kell and her Dominant. ‘If you wish, petite,’ Claudius murmured, and Kell slipped between the chairs and was in the circle with Reg, her tip-tilted nipples hard with the cold—or was it with excitement?

The Quidditch player turned to Claudius with anger in his expression. ‘What are you playing at?’ he demanded in an undertone.

‘Kelly has played with Master Reg before,’ Claudius said serenely, turning a dismissive shoulder to the towering Master David and touching Hermione on the shoulder, urging her forward. ‘Now you’ll see something special,’ he promised. ‘These two work well together.’

Kell stood submissively before Reg, as if her eyes saw no one else, and though Reg spoke to her quietly, Hermione was close enough to hear his words.

‘You know the rules, kitten,’ he said to her, reaching to unfasten the top of one stocking from the suspender belt. ‘Your legs must be as bare as your bottom if you want a whipping from me.’

Hermione couldn’t hear Kell’s response, which was spoken with averted eyes, but Reg squatted before her and rolled the stockings down her long, smooth legs before dropping them on the floor, where they were soon joined by the suspender belt. Now Kell wore only the silly green feather and her training collar, and Reg took her hand and led her to stand beneath the hook, where he bound her wrists and secured them over her head.

Then he offered her the leather handle of the whip, and Kell kissed it. She and Reg looked into each other’s eyes, and he spoke to her, his voice now pitched for Kell alone. Kell’s lips moved, and Reg kissed her mouth, lightly but thoroughly. He’s courting her, Hermione thought, feeling her own heartbeat increase with the growing tension between the black-clad Dominant and his submissive. He’s wooing her.

‘I’m beginning now,’ Reg said clearly, and those standing nearest to the chair barricade moved back
a step.

When Reg raised the whip and set it to swirling, Hermione was breathless with admiration. She had never paid much mind to Reg’s body, but it was more muscular than she might have expected of someone who projected such indolence, and he moved with grace as he began to whip the witch he so obviously wanted for his own.

Then Hermione ceased to think of them as Reg and Kell; she gave herself over to watching the snapping, stinging tail of the leather whip as it danced over the submissive’s arching, swaying torso, and every whimper from her made Hermione’s quim ache. The Dominant moved about his subject as if she were the centre of his universe, the star in whose orbit he was destined to circle, scattering blows between her shoulders and her knees, front and back, his touch deft and sure. Bright pink flares of colour appeared on the submissive’s fair skin, and Hermione knew that some of those stripes would remain, leaving bruises that would be the submissive’s reminders of her session with this man.

Now the tempo of the blows increased, flicking her inner thighs, wrapping about her hip and slapping her shaved pudendum. She cried out, begging for more, her control dissolving beneath the hands of this whip master, and Hermione found herself swaying where she stood, her nipples aching, her quim slick with want. *Her* Master could not use this implement, but he would allow her to be whipped by someone he trusted, so that she might have the experience—and dear Circe, right now, she wanted it.

At last, after a mere fifteen minutes that seemed like an hour, Reg lay down his whip and stepped up to Kell, his hands infinitely gentle, stroking up her flanks as he praised her, his words too quiet to be heard, but his tone clear. Kell leaned into him, burying her face in his neck, and he reached up to release her wrists, then swung her up against his chest. Hermione wondered how Master David would react to Reg marching past with Kell in his arms, but Reg was really much cleverer than she had given him credit for. He walked away from where Hermione, David, and Claudius stood, and a chair moved obediently out of his way as he carried his prize into a darkened alcove.

Hermione smiled to herself, thrilled for her friends, but with most of her attention elsewhere—she had an assignment to complete, and she had best attend to it while she was in the mood.

With a murmured excuse to Claudius, she slipped through the crowd, following the path Kell and Reg had taken, as if she were drawn to witness the completion of the act they had begun with the single-tail whip. *I won’t watch them*, she though distractedly, shame flushing through her body at the mere thought. *I’ll just listen … there’s no harm in listening.*

She slipped into the shadows and glanced about, listening for her friends, her hands already at her breasts, pinching her hard nipples through the diaphanous black fabric of her lingerie. There they were—in the darkest corner, where Reggie was applying a soothing oil to Kell’s hurts—and to other sensitive spots, to judge by Kell’s sounds. Hermione crept as close as she dared, finally taking up residence on a love seat whose back was toward the couple. Oh, it was shameful to invade their privacy—but they had made her a part of their interaction, performing so erotically before her very eyes, and she felt that she had to be in on the culmination, even if only peripherally. She sprawled on the loveseat, unmindful of her surroundings, her eyes closed as she listened to the moans and murmurs of the lovers behind her. She pushed the tiny knickers of her ensemble aside and began to rub her clitoris, biting her lip to keep from making a sound and giving herself away to her friends.

Behind her closed eyes, she saw the whip kissing her skin, and in her mind, it was her Master who wielded the whistling, braided leather. With his single-minded determination, he flicked the whip over her skin, and she fingered her cunt as she imagined it, allowing herself to listen in greedily to the
sounds of Reg and Kell, his voice firm, commanding, her whispers and moans of arousal feeding Hermione’s frenzy. Then Kell cried out and Hermione climaxed, biting her lip until it bled to keep herself quiet.

She rolled to one side, pressing her knees together to keep the contractions of her unruly quim contained; sometimes, when she climaxed too hard or too quickly, it could set off what felt like clitoral spasms—painful, but not harmful. The rough texture of the loveseat fabric abraded her nipples, and she rocked against it, wanting more, wanting her Master’s big, hard cock up her cunt right now.

Over stimulated, her hand was between her slick thighs again, but this time, she thrust into herself with her fingers, doing what she could to substitute for her Master’s cock. Two fingers, then three, the heel of her hand pressing on her clitoris, thinking of her Master fucking her from behind, as he had in this very room, and hearing now the slap of flesh against flesh—Reggie and Kell were doing it, too. Concentrating, she listened to their sounds, him instructing, commanding, her answering, the sounds of their bodies joining bringing Hermione clear memories of her times with her professor, making her want him very badly. She frigged herself, her free hand now moving down to rub her clitoris, driving toward another climax.

‘Good girl—good, good girl,’ she heard Reg say, and the words were like a catalyst for her. She came with a loud, moaning exhalation, unable to constrain herself, and as she rolled onto her back, breathing quickly, heart racing, she hoped Kell and Reg were having so much fun they hadn’t heard her.

Then she realised two men were standing over her.

‘Leave them alone, David,’ Claudius’ voice said, and Hermione could hear the warning in his tone—could not Master David hear it, too?

‘Well, look at this one,’ David said, and Hermione sat up, carefully covering herself with her negligee as best she could. ‘Do you think she could use some help?’

Claudius took the younger man firmly by the arm and moved him out of the alcove. ‘Can’t you see her collar, man? That’s Severus Snape’s collared submissive!’

‘Oh,’ Master David said, and his tone spoke volumes to Hermione. Master David hadn’t recognised her, but he knew who her Master was, and he had no desire to give offence.

Once again fully cognizant of her surroundings, Hermione listened for Kell and Reg, but she could no longer hear the slick slapping of flesh on flesh, nor did she hear their voices. She was startled then when they paused before her, hand in hand, and looked down at her with concern on their faces.

‘All taken care of?’ Reg asked, and though there was plenty of fodder for teasing, there was none in his tone. He was behaving like a real Dominant, and Hermione scarcely knew how to answer him.

Kell bent down and kissed Hermione’s cheek. ‘She’s fine,’ Kell said, and Hermione gave her a quick nod.

What a night! she thought, moving stealthily through the shadowy edges of the room and up first to the ground floor, then to her room.

And with two hands fragrant of her own arousal, she took up her quill and sat down to make her
Hermione went down for brunch the next day, and she smiled to see Kell sitting in Reg’s lap, being fed from his plate and sharing smouldering looks and frequent kisses. She noticed that Vi and Elinore were watching the couple as well, but neither of them looked completely happy with the turn of events.

*What do they know that I don’t?* Hermione wondered.

Master David came into the dining room but turned on his heel and walked out when he saw Kell on Reg’s knee. Kell bounced up, looking stricken. ‘David!’ she called and started to the door.

‘Let him go, Kay,’ Reg said, but to Hermione’s ears, he sounded uncertain, as if he weren’t sure letting Master David walk out was the best course of action.

‘But I should say sorry, or something,’ Kell said, clearly distressed. ‘He came up here this weekend to see me, and …’

She looked anxiously at Reg, and Hermione held her breath, waiting to see what he would do.

His face flushing scarlet, Reggie stood and threw his napkin on the table. ‘Then chase after him, why don’t you?’ he snapped and strode out of the room.

Hermione heard Vi’s audible sigh, and when she glanced down the table, she saw that Elinore was shading her eyes with her hand, as if the sight before her was too painful to watch.

Kell paid no attention to her friends at the table; she burst into tears and ran out of the room.

Monday saw the return of business as usual at Roissy House, except that Reg disappeared again, and Kell went about looking as if her best friend had died. Vi and Elinore spent time clustered around Kell, talking to her, but Kell simply sat with her head bowed and did not answer them.

The other missing component of business as usual was in Hermione’s journal—her professor had not responded to her account of spying on Kell and Reg and getting off, listening to their lovemaking, nor had he sent any fresh instructions for her. It wasn’t the first time he had missed a day or two in communicating with her, but her enforced sequestration made her feel marooned and out of touch with the world.

She read the *Prophet* each day from cover to cover, searching out mention of things that could be war related, but she saw nothing of consequence. By Wednesday, she was ready to jump out of her skin, and even the visits to t in the hospital were halted, because Vi was under the weather, and Kell had no interest in leaving her room, much less going to St Mungo’s. Hermione found herself pacing up and down the long corridor on the ground floor, imagining Harry and Ron working the counter-spell to unmake Voldemort’s body, trying to sort out from whence the danger would come to her love, and feeling the furious *uselessness* roiling through her veins like failure.
They were at dinner that night when Pitty came into the dining room and spoke to Hadrian.

‘Master Reggie is here,’ Pitty said, bowing low and speaking to her feet, ‘and he would like for Miss Kell to come out to the hall and speak to him.’

Kell stood, her face flushing bright red, then almost instantly fading to ghastly white. Hermione half-rose from her seat, wondering if Kell was going to faint.

‘Well I won’t!’ Kell cried, and she stamped one foot.

Claudius looked up wearily, his lips parted to speak a reprimand, but Vi placed a hand on his wrist and said calmly, ‘It’s not an unreasonable request, Kelly. It’s not as if anything is resolved between you.’

Kell turned a mutinous gaze on Vi, but Elinore spoke up now.

‘You can’t play with a Dom and love with a Dom and quarrel with him without ever talking things out, Kell—grown up people sort out their troubles, for better or worse.’

Kell looked desperately unhappy, but she was finding no support amongst her housemates.

‘It took a lot of courage for him to come back to see you,’ Hermione said softly. ‘You can at least talk to him.’

Wisely, Hadrian and Claudius kept their own counsel, allowing the submissives to counsel Kell, and at last, Kell stalked out of the dining room into the corridor. Very shortly, raised voices could be heard.

‘What would you say to a spot of brandy and a game of chess?’ Hadrian said to Claudius with a wry smile.

‘I say “yes”—and how about a Silencing Charm, as well?’

Elinore invited Vi and Hermione up to her and Hadrian’s room for tea, but Hermione declined, pleading the need to revise. Perhaps when she got to her room, she would find a note from her professor …

She could hear Reg and Kell’s voices until she reached the first landing up to her room, and then it was quiet. She took up her Potions textbook, intending to revise, but she found herself simply staring into the fire, thinking of nothing in particular.

It was here that Pitty found her a short time later, popping into the room and beginning to speak before Hermione had properly registered the little creature’s presence.

‘Miss!’ Pitty cried, and Hermione turned to look at her, thinking it was something about Kell and Reg—maybe they wanted her to come down and referee for them, but she wouldn’t do it!—but Pitty looked frantic, as she had done the night she brought Hermione the bloody book bag. Hermione rose from her chair, falling on her knees before the elf, looking her over desperately for signs of blood.

‘No, Miss,’ Pitty cried, backing away from Hermione, ‘Pitty is having a message from Master
Severus!

Hermione sat back on her heels, her heart beginning to race. ‘What is it?’ she asked, breathlessly.

‘Miss is to go to the hospital to be with Mistress Taffy,’ Pitty said, her voice trembling as she hurried to get the words out. ‘Miss is to take her wand and to protect Mistress Taffy from the Death Eaters!’

Death Eaters!

Hermione scrambled up, her wand slipping smoothly from her sleeve into her hand, and without wondering if she would be able to Disapparate, she turned on the spot and was gone.

Safely away from Roissy House, Hermione was not there to witness the moment when the front door of the mansion opened, and Simon Curtis, lately of the D/s community in Sussex, entered the Secret-Kept house, followed by two black-cloaked figures, who pulled masks over their faces as they stepped into the foyer.
Hermione arrived in the linen cupboard on t’s floor at St Mungo’s where once, not so long ago, she had hidden and cried. On that occasion, the memory of Rafe Lestrange’s hands on her body—a ruse to divert his brothers’ attention, certainly, but distasteful to Hermione, nonetheless—had her tied up in knots of distress, but now, she was all business. She murmured a spell to make the cupboard wall opaque to her, and seeing no one about, she slipped out.

The area was quiet; Hermione could hear no voices. Of course, visiting hours were over, so only the Healers and their helpers were likely to be traversing the corridors. Creeping along stealthily, Hermione paused outside the door to Taffy’s room. She did not wish to alarm her friend by bouncing in and inquiring after the Death Eaters, so she cast again and peered through the wall. Taffy was alone in her room, her head turned to one side and eyes closed—she was sleeping.

Hermione cast a Disillusionment Spell and paced down the corridor, her brow furrowed. How had Severus managed to get a message to Pitty? How had the message been delivered? Why had he not sent word directly to Hermione?

And where were the Death Eaters?

Having reached the corridor’s end without seeing anything unusual, Hermione heard a whirring sound and realised the lift was moving. Ducking around a corner, she watched the lift doors open, and Nymphadora Tonks bounded out and began to run lightly down the way from whence Hermione had just come.

‘Tonks!’

Hermione dropped the Disillusionment Spell just as her friend spun around, dark eyes wide in her heart-shaped face, her wand trained expertly on Hermione.

‘Merlin’s balls, Hermione!’ Tonks exclaimed, pressing a hand to the middle of her chest. ‘Bout gave me a heart attack!’

‘Sorry,’ Hermione said. ‘But Tonks—why are you here?’

The pink-haired witch shoved her wand back up her sleeve and surveyed Hermione with narrowed eyes. ‘I could ask you the same thing,’ she said. ‘Shouldn’t you be with your parents?’

Hermione thought quickly, trying to formulate a likely lie, but Tonks glanced anxiously over her shoulder then. ‘Look,’ she said distractedly, ‘you can walk with me if you want to talk, all right?’

Hermione fell into step beside Tonks. ‘Are you on duty?’ she asked.
'No,' Tonks said, speaking very softly. 'Dumbledore sent me—someone close to one of the spies is here, and the Headmaster wanted protection on hand tonight. Did he send you, too?'

'Why tonight?' Hermione asked, a new disquiet beginning to stir.

Tonks looked all around again, as if to make sure they were not being spied on. 'He didn’t tell me, but I think Harry is making his move tonight."

Hermione darted around and grabbed Tonks’ hands. ‘Where? Where are they?’

Tonks made a moue of sympathy. ‘I knew you’d hate being away from the boys all this time,’ she said. ‘But they’ve had a pretty miserable time—you’re better off out of it, believe me.’

Hermione fought down the rising tide of panic she felt. ‘Tonks!’ she said firmly. ‘Please, tell me where they are.’

Tonks shrugged and looked sincerely regretful. ‘I don’t know,’ she admitted. ‘The Headmaster only tells us what he thinks we need to know—he tells Remus different things than he tells me, even—so I’ve not been included on the bits about what Harry and Ron are doing. All I know is that it’s some kind of really old spell …’

Hermione pulled away from her impatiently. ‘Are you here to look after Rafe Lestrange’s wife?’ she demanded.

‘The Headmaster did send you!’ she said indignantly. ‘Why would he ask both of us to come? Doesn’t he think I can manage one little pregnant witch by myself?’

Hermione spoke quickly. ‘No, Dumbledore didn’t send me,’ she said. ‘I … I’ve just been looking for Harry and Ron. Can you tell me anything that might help me find them?’

Tonks shook her head. ‘No—and you don’t need to go looking for them, either. Think! You might interrupt them in the middle of something vital. Leave it alone, Hermione.’

Hermione backed two steps away. ‘You’re probably right,’ she said, her mind racing independently of her moving lips. ‘I’ll just go back home …’

Tonks obviously mistrusted her words, for she stepped forward with one hand outstretched. ‘Don’t do whatever it is you’re thinking!’ she implored, but Hermione had already turned on the spot and Disapparated.

Reg and Kell stood just inside the doorway of the large receiving room, where a few nights before they had danced together. Now, they were scarcely a pace apart, their faces flushed with anger, and they shouted their anger, confusion, and disappointment at one another, too fearful to speak the words they really wanted to say.

They were so focussed on one another, they did not hear the intruders who sauntered insolently to the doorway and paused to watch them as if they were actors on a stage, there for the amusement of the black-cloaked strangers.
'Stupefy!' Simon Curtis cried, his slurred voice showing he had imbibed freely that night, and Reggie Bardulph fell to the floor.

'Incarcerous,' one of the masked men said in a bored tone, and ropes shot out of his wand to bind Reg.

Kell whipped to face the intruders. ‘You!’ she cried furiously, recognising Simon, and she reached for her wand.

‘Crucio!’ the largest of the masked duo cried, laughing as Kell doubled over, screaming.

‘Stop!’ Simon cried, turning a horrified face to his companions, his sharp exhalation of breath stinking of Firewhisky. ‘Stop, Greg! That’s an Unforgivable, it is!’

Gregory Goyle gave one last vicious jab of his wand and turned from Kell’s unconscious body. ‘Where’re these other blokes?’ he demanded, kicking out at Reg’s booted feet. ‘The ones who like to tie up their witches and torture them?’

Vincent Crabbe looked about. ‘We’ll show ’em a spot of torture,’ he said. ‘Where are they?’

Simon was staring down at Reg and Kell, paying no attention to his companions, but Crabbe closed a meaty fist around Simon’s arm and squeezed.

‘Geroff!’ Simon shouted, trying to jerk away from Crabbe, but Goyle stepped up and took his other arm.

‘You said we could show these Muggle-lovers a thing or two,’ Crabbe reminded Simon.

‘I didn’t know you were going to use Unforgiveables!’ Simon cried, and his fear was evident, even to his thick companions. ‘You hurt her!’

There was a sound from down the long marble hall, and Simon’s head jerked around. ‘They’re down there,’ he said feebly, ‘in the Dominants’ Study.’

‘Poncy wankers,’ Crabbe muttered, and he shoved Simon roughly forward, he and Goyle following closely, their wands at his back.

Silver-haired Hadrian Hunter and the taller, younger Master Claudius appeared. Each of them wore expressions of disquiet, and when they saw the intruders, they slowed to a stop and drew closer to one another, as if to bar deeper access into the house.

‘Curtis,’ Hadrian said, speaking to Simon, ‘you were told you are no longer welcome in this house. Why have you come?’

But Crabbe gave Simon a poke in the back. ‘Are these the blokes?’ he demanded. ‘The torturing ones?’

‘Run, Master Hadrian!’ Simon screamed, no longer sounding drunk or petulant—projecting nothing but abject terror. ‘This lot are Death Eaters!’

‘Shut it, you!’ Crabbe snarled, cuffing Simon with a fist, but Goyle had better methods of controlling recalcitrant recruits.
And Simon Curtis, whose sins included over-fondness for drink and poor choice of companions, but who had tried to do the right thing in the end, paid for his stupidity with his life.

The blond wizard drew his wand, stepping forward, his eyes on the living predators, rather than their dead victim. ‘I'll hold them, Hadrian,’ he said coldly, and the older man set off down the hallway at a run.

Two jets of red light shot toward Claudius, but his Protego! blocked the spells, and a duel ensued, the two remaining intruders versus the wizard protecting his home and his family.

Had Claudius been less desperate, or had his younger opponents been less the worse for drink, matters might have gone ill for him. As it was, he was holding his own against the Death Eaters when Hadrian called to him from the Dungeon doorway.

‘All clear, Claudius!’

And gathering all his power and skill, Claudius cast one last spell.

‘Confringo!’

The spell hit the marble floor with a great, concussive roar, knocking the Death Eaters from their feet and pulverizing the white Italian marble, as well as the wood beneath it, creating a crater in the middle of the elegant hallway. Claudius had already begun the run to the Dungeon door, and the blast knocked him from his feet, speeding him closer to his goal.

Hadrian darted from the Dungeon door, which remained held open by Pitty, and helped his friend to his feet.

‘Elinore and Vi are below with the servants,’ Hadrian said, all but carrying Claudius to the doorway. ‘Pitty sent Hermione away when the Death Eaters came through the door. You fought like a soldier, my friend.’

‘What of Kelly and Reg?’ Claudius croaked, attempting to look back down the long hallway.

‘On their own,’ Hadrian said, pulling Claudius through the doorway, and Pitty allowed the heavy door to slam shut behind them. ‘Don’t fret—Reg knows how to use his wand.’

Claudius managed a grin, though he was covered with marble dust and blood from flying marble pieces. ‘Kelly can duel, as well,’ he said. ‘They’ll find out how well, if they don’t kill her first.’

‘Darling!’

Vi rushed up the steps, and Claudius received her with rare tenderness. ‘Don’t fret, precious—I am well.’

And with Hadrian and Pitty shepherding them from behind, Vi led her Master down to the anxiously waiting Elinore.
Kell lay upon the floor of the large receiving room, hearing the sounds of duelling from farther down the corridor and feeling as if her muscles had been rendered to jelly. The echo of the excruciating pain of the Cruciatius Curse remained in her consciousness, but she ignored it, and gritting her teeth, she pushed herself shakily into a sitting position.

‘Kay?’

She turned her head and saw Reg lying a few feet from her, struggling against his bindings even as he spoke to her.

‘Are you all right?’ he asked. ‘Do you think you could help me out? The others are in danger.’

And Kell’s mind slammed into working order. Death Eaters and Simon Curtis were in the house! Curtis, that filthy, lying toad, had used his entrée to Roissy House to bring Death Eaters here! And her friends had no idea—Elinore, Vi, Hermione—she had to help them!

Scrambling ungracefully across the floor, she fumbled uselessly at Reg’s ropes, her fingers clumsy against the knots.

‘Cut them with your wand, love,’ Reggie murmured, and Kell paused a moment to look into his eyes, her hands stilled. ‘You can do it,’ he assured her soothingly.

Kell reached across the floor to retrieve her fallen wand. ‘Of course I can,’ she said. ‘Now, don’t move a muscle …’

Reg shook the ropes from his limbs, the acrid smell of their burned hemp fibres sharp in his nose, and offered his hand to Kell. She clasped it and he pulled her to her feet. ‘You know how to use that thing to fight, don’t you?’ he asked, nodding to the length of holly in her hand.

‘Yes,’ Kell replied, her fear for her friends overcoming her fear of the intruders. ‘Let’s go!’

Reg’s lips twisted and he kissed her roughly. ‘You’re one in a million, Kay,’ he murmured in her ear, and then the two of them ran into the broad marble corridor, wands at the ready.

Hermione arrived back in her room at Roissy House and stood for a moment in an effort to quiet her shaking hands. Something was off, but she didn’t know what it was. Why had Severus sent her to the hospital if Dumbledore was also sending Tonks? She had to find Pitty, to question her.

‘Pitty!’ she called, but the house-elf did not pop into the room. What could keep Pitty from responding?

Oh yes, something was definitely wrong.

Moving stealthily, Hermione crept into the hallway and to the head of the stairs, but she could hear nothing. Following an instinct she did not question, she turned aside and traversed the hallway in the other direction, moving to the head of the grand staircase, down which her Master had paraded her on that Dungeon night that seemed so long ago. Pausing only long enough to Disillusion herself for
the second time that night, Hermione crept down the stairway until the flashes of bright light and sounds of scuffling feet told her there was fighting going forward downstairs. Without another thought, she ran down to the landing.

Two hooded Death Eaters, their cloaks liberally dusted with inexplicable white powder, duelled below, back to back, each of them engaged with one opponent. Hermione could see the one nearest her was Reg, his curly hair damp with sweat—but it was the other duellist who frightened Hermione. Kell was quick, her bright blue eyes burning with intensity, but it was obvious that her strength was waning. How long had they been fighting? And how long could one fight without tiring? Hermione’s only experience with real duelling had come two years before, in the Department of Mysteries, and then it seemed as if she had spent more time trying to run away from the Death Eaters than attempting to engage them in hand to hand combat. In the end, she had been incapacitated by one quick spell, and her reward had been to lie in the Hospital Wing for two weeks, listening to Ronald brag and swallowing nasty potions.

She wanted desperately to take out Kell’s opponent, but Reg was between Hermione and her desired target. She could Petrify Reg’s adversary, but once she did, she would lose the advantage of surprise. She wracked her brain for another alternative, for a spell which would immobilise both of the Death Eaters at once, but nothing occurred to her. And even in the few seconds it took for her thoughts to stream through her mind, she could see Kell falter, barely getting her guard up to shield against the virulent red of the attacker’s Unforgiveable cry of Crucio!

With her heart in her throat, Hermione reacted on instinct, flying down the remaining stairs and past Reg and his masked assailant. She stopped, breathless, and raised her wand. With a non-verbal Petrificus Totalus! she brought the heavy-set Death Eater fighting with Kell crashing to the floor, then she whirled to the other one and put up a Shield Charm.

Just as she had expected, the jet of light from her Full Body Bind Spell had attracted the attention of the other Death Eater, and he spun away from Reg. Yet the Death Eater’s searching glance seemed to glide right past where Hermione stood as he pivoted and directed his attention to Kell.

‘Sectumsepra!’ he cried, slashing at the girl before she could raise her defence, his wand tracing an angle from just beneath Kell’s right ear to her left hipbone.

Hermione stared in wordless horror as blood erupted from Kell’s torn throat, bright red jets which seemed to spurt with every beat of her heart. Time appeared to slow, and Hermione was frozen with the gruesomeness of what she was seeing. A cold, analytical part of her mind reported that Kell’s carotid artery had been severed, and that she was bleeding to death.

Hermione stumbled forward, her Disillusionment Spell falling as all of her attention was diverted from it. As she came to rest beside Kell’s head, she conjured a square of white cloth. She was scarcely aware of Reg felling the remaining Death Eater and binding and gagging them both, and then he was on his knees on the other side of Kell’s body, agony on his face.

‘Kay,’ he said, ‘speak to me. Kay!’

Hermione applied pressure at Kell’s throat and nodded tersely at the less grievous but still gushing wound bisecting her torso. ‘Conjure cloth!’ she snapped. ‘Apply pressure!’

Reg was crying, harsh, wracking sobs, but even so, he obeyed Hermione’s commands, the white cloth beneath his hands almost immediately becoming saturated with dark red blood.
‘I’m sorry, baby, so sorry,’ Reg sobbed. ‘I love you. Don’t leave me. I swear I’ll get better.’ He pressed harder on her midsection, one hand atop the other. ‘I was weak and wrong—it was all me. You’re a good girl. Don’t go.’

There was commotion from either direction, and Vi raced down the grand staircase with Claudius behind her, while Hadrian approached from down the corridor. There was a confused babble of voices, and lengths of clean white cloth materialised, handed to Hermione and Reg and applied over the top of the sopping bandages already in place.

‘She needs St Mungo’s,’ Claudius said, standing behind Vi, who had knelt in the gore at Kell’s head and begun the singing chant Hermione had used on Severus’ wounds.

‘We have to control the bleeding before we move her!’ Hermione said, accepting another cloth from Hadrian and pressing it down.

‘Don’t leave me, Kay,’ Reggie croaked. His crying had subsided to ragged breathing, his voice ravaged by the shredding sobs which had issued from his throat. ‘I’ll train with Hadrian—he’s already agreed, baby. I’ll learn to be the Master you deserve.’ He leaned up, his hands still pressing on the gory dressing on Kell’s stomach, and he kissed her blood-stained cheek. ‘I’ll never send you away again. I swear it.’

Vi stopped singing, and unmindful of the horrible, slick coating of blood on Kell’s neck, she pressed fingers to the undamaged side. After a few seconds, she raised her wand and cast a spell. When she spoke, it was in a choked voice.

‘She bled out. She’s gone.’

And as Reg keened over his fallen love, entreating her not to leave him, Hermione sat back and cast the same spell Vi had used, checking Kell’s vital signs. It was true; Kell no longer had a heartbeat. She had bled too copiously and too quickly for them to stop it.

Kell was dead.
Kell was dead.

Hermione remained in her place at Kell’s shoulder, with Vi beside her, at Kell’s head, and Reg prostrate beside the still body of his beloved. Claudius squatted behind the crying Vi, pulling her against his chest and holding her. Hadrian stood helplessly to the side, grief etched on his face, and from down the corridor, Elinore’s chair glided silently to a stop beside her husband. She took in the situation with her usual perspicacity, and saying nothing, she simply took Hadrian’s hand.

And Hermione’s mind whirled, almost independently of her emotions. Dumbledore had told Harry there was no spell to bring someone back from the dead—for it there were, would anyone ever die, as long as someone they loved survived to cast the resurrection spell? But Kell had just been with them, fighting, then struck down and bleeding—but just now, she had been a living, breathing organism.

In teaching herself the Elder Futhark runes, so that she would be able to translate the spell Harry needed, Hermione had learned two very old spells: a Healing Charm she had used to clear a light acne break-out from her face, and a spell to rejuvenate a dead organism. She had been repulsed at the notion of using it on an animal, but she had reanimated a dead houseplant with the spell.

Would it work on Kell?

If it didn’t, what harm could there be in trying?

Taking her wand into her blood-caked hands, Hermione began the incantation, carefully tracing the wand movements in the air above Kell’s body, all of her intent and skill focussed on casting.

‘Hermione?’ Hadrian said, sounding concerned. ‘What are you doing?’

Hermione scarcely heard him and made no effort to answer; she continued to chant the ancient words, feeling the power of the spell gathering within her, and she directed it at Kell, her voice rising as she cast. In a visible stream of silvery light, the spell illuminated Kell’s supine form until she was radiant. The heat of it drove Reggie into a sitting position, his eyes questioning and wide. And still Hermione bore down on the tangible edge of the magic, bringing all of her power to bear—

And Kell’s eyes opened.

‘Kay?’ Reg whispered, leaning over her, his palm cupping her cheek.

‘Master?’ Kell quavered, and even as Reg answered her, Claudius bent to peer into her face.

‘What is it, petit?’ Claudius asked kindly.
‘I meant Master Reggie,’ Kell said, rubbing her cheek against Reg’s hand. She sounded weary beyond words. ‘What happened to the Death Eaters?’

As the Dominants answered her question, Hermione and Vi cast simultaneous diagnostic spells, and from the side, Elinore’s voice came, hushed and almost reverent.

‘Sweet Nimüe! You brought her back to life!’

Hermione settled back onto the floor, feeling as if she had run a marathon, and Vi replaced her wand up her sleeve and spoke briskly to those surrounding her. ‘Hermione’s spell healed some of the damage, but Kelly desperately needs Blood Replenishing Potion and the attentions of a proper Healer.’

‘Of course,’ Reg said, stroking Kell’s red-streaked cheek, staring down into her face with wondering eyes.

‘Reg and I will Disapparate with her to St Mungo’s, if that’s acceptable to you, Master,’ Vi said, turning her face to Claudius.

‘Do you need me, as well?’ he asked her.

Vi raised her eyebrows at Reg, but he shook his head. ‘I think we can handle it,’ he said to Claudius. ‘Perhaps you and Hadrian could deal with this lot.’ He flicked disdainful eyes to the two trussed Death Eaters on the floor. ‘But weren’t there three? Where’s the third?’

‘One of them killed Simon Curtis,’ Hadrian said grimly. ‘You can count on us to sort them out, Reg. Go, and Godspeed.’

Reg and Vi each took one of Kell’s hands and Disapparated. Claudius crossed to Hadrian and began to speak in lowered tones, while Elinore’s chair appeared at Hermione’s side.

‘You must be shattered, my dear,’ Elinore said, placing her hand on Hermione’s hair. ‘I don’t believe I’ve ever heard of a spell like that, before … What was it?’

Hermione looked up into the older woman’s eyes. ‘I found it in an Ancient Runes textbook,’ she said, hearing the exhaustion in her voice. ‘I used it to revitalise a houseplant. I didn’t know if it would work on a person …’

Elinore looked troubled. ‘Perhaps you should go up and wash off the blood?’ she suggested. ‘I can send Pitty to collect your clothes.’

But Hermione stood up, as if to dispel the image of herself as tired. ‘No, I may as well keep them on until we get this cleared up.’ She indicated the large circle of blood on the marble floor. She saw that Elinore wanted to argue, and she held up one hand. ‘I’d prefer to do this, Elinore,’ she said quietly. ‘I need the … occupation.’

‘Oh, my dear,’ Elinore said, her voice warm with concern. ‘I am sure Severus is all right!’

Hermione glanced to her, expressionless. ‘Do you think so?’ she asked.

Elinore moved to confer with Hadrian and Claudius, and Hermione stared at the two black-cloaked
lumps who were the cause of all the turmoil. With a severe expression on her face, she marched over to them and ripped the masks from their faces.

Gregory Goyle and Vincent Crabbe.

They immediately began to buck against the ropes which wrapped about them from ankles to shoulders, and they made guttural, incoherent noises behind their gags, but Hermione turned away from them, disgusted. It was horrible to believe that two boys who had started school at the same time she had done—who had been in some of her classes, eaten with her in the Great Hall—had voluntarily become Death Eaters, and tonight, had killed a man.

Starting at the far edge of the lake of Kell’s blood, which was congealing on the floor, she began to siphon it up, moving the tip of her wand carefully from side to side, completely absorbed in the mindless task. She did not know how much time had passed when Crabbe and Goyle began to make new noises, horrible screams behind their gags. Hermione turned back to them, disconcerted. What was wrong with them?

Hadrian, Elinore, and Claudius, who had taken their discussion to the sitting room, returned to the entryway at a fast clip.

“What’s wrong with them, Hermione?” Hadrian asked, perplexed.

“I don’t know,” Hermione responded. ‘They just began to make those noises.’

‘Remove one of their gags,’ Elinore said. ‘I don’t want another death in my house.’

Claudius looked doubtful, but Hadrian complied with his wife’s request, and Crabbe began to scream, a full-throated, ghastly wail.

‘What is wrong with you?’ Hadrian demanded, his voice stern and commanding, and to Hermione’s surprise, Crabbe responded to the tone of authority.

‘My arm! It’s burning off!’ Crabbe gasped.

‘Do you want to look at his arm?’ Claudius asked shortly.

‘Yes, please,’ Elinore said.

‘Stupefy!’ Claudius said, Stunning Crabbe, and then he repeated the spell on Goyle.

Hadrian removed the ropes with the sweep of his wand, and he and Claudius knelt beside their prisoners, pushing up the sleeves of their hooded Death Eater robes.

‘Look!’ Hermione cried, pointing to Goyle’s left arm, and a glance at Crabbe showed the same phenomenon playing out. The Dark Mark was burned there, black as night upon the pale skin, and as the inhabitants of Roissy House watched, the Mark leached from black to red, from red to grey, from grey to tan, and then was gone.

Hermione staggered backward, collapsing onto the step of the marble staircase, uncertain of her legs.

‘What does it mean?’ Elinore said, directing a questioning look to her husband.
Hadrian stared across at Claudius, his eyes bright. ‘What do you think?’ he murmured.

Claudius pointed his wand at Crabbe and wrapped him in ropes again, repeating the act on Goyle, his expression indifferent. It was Hermione who answered the question.

‘It means that Harry was successful,’ she said, her voice shaking. ‘He has unmade Voldemort’s body and killed him.’ She covered her eyes with one trembling hand.

Hermione siphoned the last of Kell’s blood from the white marble floor, feeling as if she had been pummelled ceaselessly by brutal fists. So much had happened tonight—attacking a Death Eater, seeing Kell die, channelling all of her magical energy into the spell to revitalise Kell, seeing the Dark Mark disappear from the Death Eaters’ arms—it was no wonder she was done in.

Hermione stood, bending backwards a bit and hearing the satisfactory crackle of her vertebrae clicking into place. Inside, she felt oddly numb, and in a way, she was glad of it. If she were forced to feel the emotions of every single thing that had happened in the last several hours, she would likely run mad.

She moved into the large receiving room, noting the singed ropes lying upon the floor there. Who was tied up in here? she wondered.

Unwilling to expend the necessary brain power to sort it out, she moved over to a chair against the wall and sagged into it, unmindful of the bloodied filth of her clothes. Even as she subsided into the straight chair, she heard the pop! of Apparition as a house-elf arrived in the corridor, no doubt to tidy up the bits Hermione might have missed.

Hadrian had Disapparated to Sussex, to deliver the body of Simon Curtis to Master Thorn of the D/s community there. Simon had been a foolish man, unfit to be a Dominant, but in the end, he had been a decent human being.

Claudius had taken charge of Crabbe and Goyle, Disapparating with them in tow to the Ministry of Magic. No doubt the Aurors would be very busy that night, if Harry Potter had truly defeated the Dark Lord, but the inhabitants of Roissy House had no desire to keep the murdering Death Eaters in their midst for one additional moment. They would suffer the intrusion of the Aurors as necessary over the coming days, to investigate the crimes which had been committed there, but for now, they wanted the Death Eaters gone.

Hermione was staring into space when she heard the sounds of an arrival in the entryway, and then she heard the voice of Severus Snape.

‘Welcome home, Master Severus!’ the piping voice of Pitty proclaimed.

‘Tell me what’s happened,’ Professor Snape’s voice commanded. ‘Dark Magic has been used here.’

‘Death Eaters is coming into Roissy House!’ Pitty exclaimed, her voice betraying her loathing. ‘As soon as they is crossing the doorway, Pitty is going to Miss Hermione, telling her to hurry to Mistress Taffy, just as Master Severus commands!’

The professor’s voice cut across that of the house-elf. ‘How did they get in?’ he demanded.
‘That bad man, Simon Curtis, is bringing them in,’ Pitty answered.

‘Who were they? Did you hear their names?’ The professor was firing his questions so fast Pitty scarcely had time to draw breath from one to the next.

‘Master Hadrian is saying they is crabs and gargoyles,’ Pitty reported. ‘But Pitty didn’t hear any names, Master Severus.’

‘Christ,’ the professor breathed. ‘What happened, Pitty? Is anyone hurt?’

‘Simon Curtis is dead,’ Pitty informed him. ‘The Death Eaters is killing him. And …’

There was a horrible, gurgling sniff.

‘Tell me!’ the professor shouted, and there was a squeak, as if the house-elf had been grabbed.

‘M-miss Kell is d-dead!’ Pitty wailed. ‘And then M-miss Hermione is making her not dead! And there is all this blood to clean!’

‘Where is Hermione?’ Professor Snape asked urgently.

‘I’m here,’ Hermione said from the doorway, and the professor turned to her, his face suddenly lightening from the thunderous expression he had exhibited mere seconds before.

‘You’re covered in blood!’ he said, taking a step towards her, but Hermione withdrew into the shadows of the receiving room, and he followed. ‘Are you injured?’

There was a pop! as Pitty Disapparated, but Hermione was watching him, a wave of churning emotion replacing the numbness she had been feeling. ‘No, I’m not injured,’ she said flatly. ‘Please tell me what Pitty meant—that you commanded her to send me away when the Death Eaters entered the house.’

The professor made a dismissive gesture with his hand, and Hermione had the leisure to remark his appearance. His face was streaked with soot, as if he had been through a dirty Floo, but the eye patch was gone, and though the skin around his injured eye was still red and raw looking, the eye itself was no longer the colour of blood. His hair and cloak were filthy, but otherwise, he appeared unharmed.

‘It is of no consequence,’ he began, but Hermione cut across him.

‘I beg to differ,’ she said, in that same strange, even tone. ‘It is of consequence to me.’

His nostrils flared in annoyance. ‘I had given instructions to Pitty,’ he said impatiently, ‘that in the event of any occurrence which would make the house unsafe for you, she was to dispatch you to St Mungo’s.’

‘To “protect” Taffy?’

He shrugged. ‘It was as good an excuse as any.’

Hermione felt her lips twisting in anger, and she made no attempt to stop it. ‘And what about
everyone else in the house?’ she demanded, her voice rising. ‘What about their safety?’

He took another step toward her, and she again moved away, placing a round-topped occasional table between them.

‘You’re being ridiculous,’ he said harshly. ‘I am responsible for your wellbeing—not that of every person in this house—and I made arrangements to safeguard you.’

‘How unfortunate for you that Dumbledore sent Tonks to see after that at the hospital—Tonks was offended, thinking the Headmaster had sent me to check up on her.’

She knew from the expression on his face that he had been unaware of this development. Still, he drew himself to his full height and looked down his nose at her.

‘I scarcely see what difference it makes,’ he said, supremely indifferent.

And with a flash of blinding clarity, something in Hermione broke free, propelling her forward, where she slapped the palms of her hands down on the table between them. ‘Because Kell died!’ she screamed, uncaring that she was loud enough for everyone in the house to hear her. ‘It could have been any of them—it could have been all of them! And I wasn’t here to help—to fight—to protect them!’

She turned from him jerkily, pacing toward the far wall.

‘What if Tonks hadn’t been there, Severus? What if I had stayed to protect Taffy, and more than Kell had been hurt? How do you think I could have lived with myself after that?’

With a wave of his hand he illuminated the chandelier overhead and stared across at her, his black eyes glittering in the candlelight, his thin lips pressed together in an intransigent white line.

‘Your job is not to fill your head with a plethora of pointless “what-ifs”,’ he informed her coldly.

The world was suddenly full of bright colours, razor-sharp images, and her thoughts stood out in her mind in stark relief, like winter-bare black trees against a vast expanse of snow.

‘Stop telling me what to think and how to feel!’ she cried, carried along on the current of her outrage. ‘You have no respect for me as a capable adult, and you never have!’ She gestured at the marble tiled corridor. ‘I watched Kell bleed to death! I did everything I could do to save her!’ She began to cry, furious with herself for it but unable to stop. ‘She was dead—dead, Severus! Reggie was crying—it was horrible! And then I used that spell—the one I learned from the Ancient Futhark textbook—and she came back to life!’

She lapsed into wracking sobs, pressing her hands, still bearing traces of Kell’s blood, to her face and rocking where she stood. She heard his boots upon the floor as he crossed to her, but she spun away from him when he touched her shoulder.

‘Don’t touch me!’ she shrieked, retreating from him and putting the table between them again.

‘She was obviously not dead, or the spell would not have revived her,’ he said, his voice soothing. ‘She was most likely near death, but you know there is no spell to reanimate a dead person.’

Hermione dragged the sleeve of her jumper across her eyes. ‘You weren’t here! You don’t know!’
He came closer, still speaking in soothing tones. ‘I am sure it was very upsetting for you,’ he said. ‘I am sorry for that, Hermione.’

She glared across the table at him. ‘Do you know, I don’t think you are sorry,’ she said, and as the words passed her lips, she knew they were true. ‘You have done exactly what you wanted to do, for your own reasons, every step of the way, lying when it suited you, showing no respect for me as a person, and every time I made any attempt to take part in the war, you reacted as if I had deliberately done something to hurt or disobey you.’ Her voice rose again, screeching. ‘You can’t have it all your way! This isn’t just about you, Severus Snape!’

He stopped at that, his eyes raking over her face, as if the tone of her voice and content of her words gave him serious pause. ‘Hermione,’ he tried again, his voice placating, ‘Potter did the thing—he destroyed the Dark Lord! The war is over!’

Hermione wrapped her arms about her torso, her lips still trembling with emotion, and stared into his face. ‘I know that,’ she said miserably.

‘Don’t you see?’ he coaxed, stepping to her side, but she countered by moving again to the other side of the table. Still, he continued, ‘We’re both unharmed—we can make plans for the future—live our lives, now.’

She gaped at him, scarcely able to believe that he could say such a thing. For all the times he’d forbidden her to help her friends, demanded that she hide away in the house, upbraided her for being the courageous woman she knew herself to be—still, she had convinced herself time and again that he did respect her choices and her intelligence. Now, she knew better.

‘How can I possibly trust you?’ she said sadly.

He leaned toward her. ‘I have made many mistakes with you—I’ve never tried to hide that—but I will never stop trying to learn to be the best Master for you! I will make it right!’

She shook her head. ‘That’s not possible—not after what you’ve done, Severus,’ she said, and as she spoke the words, she knew that she was not simply saying hurtful things in the midst of a row: She was speaking her heart’s truth.

‘But I love you, Hermione.’ He opened his empty hands, his tone imploring, his midnight eyes beseeching her. His voice dropped, his tone silky, intimate. ‘I’ve never said those words to another person. I love you.’

There was a time when such a confession from him would have filled her with light, but now she felt curiously unmoved, as if he were speaking of people from another time and place. And her fingers were beneath her hair, fumbling with the buckled leather.

‘I have no use for love where neither honesty nor respect exist,’ she said, and feeling as if a living part of her body had been excised, she placed her collar on the table between them.

His face blanched white. ‘Don’t do this,’ he said, but his voice was barely above a whisper.

‘I return your collar to you,’ she said, feeling terror rising in her like ice, knowing that when it reached her heart she would die—but persisting, also knowing she was doing the right thing. ‘I withdraw my offer of submission.’
And as she spoke the words, there was a burning sensation at her waist, and she knew her mithril chain—her Christmas gift from him—had disintegrated, leaving her free.

‘Hermione,’ he whispered, but she cut across him.

‘I am going to the hospital until I’m sure Kell is all right. Please don’t follow me. Don’t come to see me. I’ll send for my things.’

‘You needn’t go away from Roissy House,’ he said, almost as one speaking in a dream.

‘This is your home, not mine,’ she said, and he seemed to pull in upon himself, as if he had been struck.

Her last sight of him remained with her like an image burned on her retinas, for she saw it every time she closed her eyes: Severus Snape, standing alone, a black leather collar draped loosely over his long fingers, his empty eyes staring past her like endless black tunnels.
Chapter 68: Limbo

For the Potions Master's Amusement

Chapter 68: Limbo

Searing … blinding … consuming …

She stumbled out the door of Roissy House, into the cold, dark night. The lights of Grosvenor Square made no impression upon her as she hurried down the walk, her fists shoved in her robes, her head down. The agony screamed through her body, a physical pain, as if she had taken up an axe and severed a limb to free herself from a trap, as if her life’s blood was now streaming ceaselessly from her body.

She staggered and leaned against a wall, feeling the rough brick against her skin, forcing herself to think past the billowing, engulfing torment. If she had something to think about—something upon which to focus her attention—she could close the door on the interminable anguish. She would come back to it—sort it out—when she had cauterised the wound with work … when she had numbed herself sufficiently to endure the agony.

Kell … she needed to be with Kell.

She set a small goal and moved from one to the next: Find the hospital. Find the lift. Find the floor. Find the room …

Hermione arrived at St Mungo’s and sought out the Spell Damage ward.

Once there, she immersed herself in caring for her friend.

Kell had lost a great deal of blood, and her body required time to heal. She took a good many potions and slept a lot. Reggie returned to Roissy House at night to shower and sleep, but Hermione stayed behind, sleeping on a cot against the wall. It was bittersweet for her watching Reg and Kell together, simultaneously gratifying and heartrending to hear them planning their lives together—gratifying because Hermione had played a part in bringing them together and heartrending for reasons she could not even bear to formulate in her mind.

Reg and Kell were aware of the change in Hermione’s circumstances—undoubtedly, someone at Roissy House had filled Reg in on the details—but they were kind enough not to mention it or ask her for details, and for that, she could only be grateful.

The worst moment of that period was the late night when, while Kell was sleeping, the door to the hospital room opened, and Rafe Lestrange entered.

‘Oh, no,’ Hermione breathed, shrinking back against her chair and shaking her head. Why had he
come? Had he been … sent? Was he an emissary of some sort? No, no! She couldn’t bear it!

He held his hands up as if placating a wild creature. 'It's all right,' he promised, halting in his tracks. 'I’m not here to disturb or upset you.'

Her lips trembled, and she bit down hard to stop it. She had kept such a tight lid on her feelings, but just seeing Rafe brought back images of...

'Please,' she whispered. 'Don’t.'

He looked genuinely distressed. 'We just want to be sure that you’re safe and well,' he said. 'And t and I want you to know that we're your friends—no matter what.'

She stood now, backing away from him, shaking her head from side to side. Panic was rising in her chest. Any discussion with this man would go down a path Hermione could not afford—could not bear—to tread. She just wanted not to see Rafe and not to think about the memories and feelings his presence evoked.

'We’ll never betray your confidence,' he said. 'I promise on my honour … as a Dominant.'

Hermione nodded to signify her understanding, fighting the urge to clap her hands over her ears and sing la-la-la-la until he went away.

'Hermione,' he said, coming one step closer, 'we know how unsettling the world can be for a submissive without a Dominant. You will always have my protection. You can come to t and me at any time or call on me as if I were your brother. Do you understand?'

Tears spilled over onto her cheeks as she was flooded with desolation—without! alone!—and Rafe's face filled with compassion.

'Don’t forget we want you to be godmother to the baby,' he said, stepping over to the small table beside her cot and placing a handkerchief there. 'And I know you're busy now, with Kelly, but I'm taking t home tomorrow, to our house in Odd Down. You must come to stay—t will be heartbroken if you don't.'

Hermione wanted to ask about t and the baby, but her voice wouldn’t cooperate. She had not been to see t, even though she’d been staying with Kell in hospital just one floor away. She felt badly about it, but she couldn’t bring herself to see someone who might ask what had happened, or even worse, how she felt about it. So instead of speaking, she nodded.

Rafe removed a handsome black leather card case from his pocket and riffled through the cards there to the back of the pile. The one he extracted was pale pink, and he placed it on top of the handkerchief. ‘One of t’s calling cards,’ he explained. ‘It has our direction, when you’re ready to visit. And your owl can always find us at Odd Cottage in Somerset.’

He slipped the card case into his cloak and studied her, a frown on his brow, as if he were making up his mind about something. Apparently, he made a decision, for he moistened his lips and took a deep breath.

‘Hermione,’ he said, taking a step toward her, ‘Se—’

But whatever he meant to tell her, Hermione did not hear it. With a total loss of self-control, she
whirled away from him, facing the wall, and clapped her hands over her ears like a little girl playing a game. She remained there, her forehead pressed to the wall, until she had counted to one hundred. When she turned again, Rafe had gone.

Finally, Kell was released from hospital, and Reg and Vi came to gather her things before taking her home to Roissy House to recuperate. Hermione helped, packing a rucksack with all the magazines and books Kell had collected during her hospital stay. At last, everything was organised, and Reg helped Kell into her cloak.

‘Are you sure?’ Vi asked quietly, taking Hermione aside, her lovely face drawn with concern. ‘There’s … no one there you wouldn’t want to see, and all of your things can be moved to a different room.’

Hermione’s stomach lurched at these words, as all the emotions she had bottled up inside stirred beneath the barrier she kept in place, between them and her consciousness. ‘I’m sure,’ she said. ‘I haven’t been home since summer—I need to see my family.’ She managed a smile. ‘But thank you.’

Vi pressed a kiss to her cheek. ‘Hadrian and Elinore asked me to tell you that you will always be welcome at Roissy House.’

Hermione nodded and turned deliberately away, unable to continue that line of discussion.

Day by day, life went on.

She knew it was a pathetic, ridiculous cliché, but one day at a time, she survived, so she didn’t condemn herself for it. Anything that helped her get through the formless, grey days was, by definition, all right.

At home, she found herself comforted by the familiarity of her parents and her own room, none of which had been contaminated by the events of the last several months. And living with her parents, it was possible for her friends to find her, so she was able to catch up with Harry and Ron.

‘What, no more dog collars?’ Ron asked, indicating her bare throat.

‘That’s right,’ she answered lightly. ‘Now, tell me everything! How did you do it?’

Hogwarts opened again after Easter break for the summer term, but Hermione did not return. She had revised to the point that she could sit her NEWTs now, if she wished, and besides, she was no longer a schoolgirl. She simply could not see herself participating in the school routine again.

She did not permit herself to think more deeply about it than that.

It was at night, in her dreams, that her self-imposed emotional freeze was put to naught. Her dreams were full of him, of his voice and his hands and his lips and his whipcord thin body, dominating hers. At first, the dreams had been devastating for her, and she had woken from them time after time in a paroxysm of anguished tears. As time went on, though, she learned to harden herself against the
dreams, beginning to see his presence there as yet another invasion.

The one tolerable thing that came from the dreams was the orgasms. Never had she thought it would be possible to orgasm in her sleep, but she did, and with alarming frequency. Since she had no desire to seek sexual relief in her waking hours, she could only be glad of the release she found in her sleep; undoubtedly, it improved her disposition.

Because there was no question: Hermione Jane Granger had changed. Her parents had noticed, and her mum had even tried to talk with her about what was troubling her, but Hermione couldn’t begin to say. How could she possibly tell her mother what had happened?

‘I had an affair with my teacher, Mum, but don’t worry! Yes, he spanked and whipped and flogged me and covered me in hot candle wax and fucked me every possible way—but it’s all over now.’

No, she couldn’t confide in her mother—not the details. She compromised with a partial truth. ‘I fell in love with someone, but it didn’t work out. I’m … not over it, yet.’

And with that, her parents had to be content.

Still, when Hermione looked in the mirror, she could see the changes in her appearance, even if the hole where her soul once had been was not visible to her.

Her hair, always impossible, had become worse than ever, dry and straw-like; her cheeks appeared hollow, and there were purplish shadows about her eyes. It was as if she were suffering from an illness which deprived her of restful sleep and prevented her body from absorbing sufficient nourishment.

She wasn’t pining for him. She wasn’t. It was just that she had to re-educate her mind, body and spirit to … do without. It was only an illusion that the world had become darker, that colours were more dreary, and that food tasted of ashes. It was a mere trick of the mind that made her unable to bear music, unable to read anything but the driest textbooks, unable to watch the telly or go to the movies with her parents, that made any glimpse of affectionate behaviour between two people fill her with an agony of longing—and loss.

She didn’t regret what she had done—it was right, she was sure of it. But knowing with her mind and feeling with her heart were two very different things.

The boys had returned to Hogwarts, and it was from an inadvertent slip in one of Harry’s letters that she learned the Potions master had returned to his post there. It was only a tiny piece of information, but it was the first she had received. She was scrupulously careful in her correspondence with t, Kell, and Vi to make it clear that she had no desire to receive reports of her former Master’s activities, and they all seemed to understand. Although she had not expressly told the boys of her preference, their infrequent letters were too brief to demand much information from her; they were too busy imparting their own.

She received an owl from Professor Dumbledore, inviting her to sit her NEWTs with her classmates, but Hermione was not tempted to accept. Instead, she arranged to sit her examinations at the Ministry two weeks before they were administered at the school, and she walked away feeling confident that she had done very well.
In July, she travelled to the Burrow to celebrate Harry’s eighteenth birthday, and she stayed on into August, thankful for the change of scenery and the ease with which she fell back into her old roles of friend and confidante with Harry, Ron, and Ginny.

Away from her parents, immersed in Weasleys, watching them together, Hermione’s fear of seeing other humans interacting with one another slowly faded. And the frequency with which she saw Harry and Ginny stealing a snog in the orchard, or Bill and Fleur occupying the same armchair as if there were a scarcity of furniture in the house, or one of Ron’s twin brothers chatting up the shop girls in the village, began to thaw the deep freeze under which she had guarded her emotions for so many weeks. She could see a man embrace a woman without her breath stopping in her lungs—without feeling as if she had lost a part of her humanity which she could never, ever reclaim.

One night, sitting on a rock by the frog pond behind the Burrow, she was surprised to have Ron sit down beside her.

‘So,’ he said, hugging his knees to his chest, ‘what will you do now?’

Hermione tilted her head back to look up into the star strewn sky. ‘What do you mean?’

‘Now that we’ve left school,’ Ron elaborated.

Hermione reached up to brush hair from her face. ‘I haven’t decided yet,’ she admitted. ‘But at least I feel like I can decide, now.’

‘You mean,’ Ron said carefully, ‘since … Snape, and all?’

Hermione turned her head and looked into her friend’s blue eyes. ‘Yes,’ she answered. ‘Since Snape.’

And with that, she spoke his name for the first time since the fall of Voldemort and suffered it to be spoken in her presence without violence or tears.

She was healing.
Chapter 69: Revisiting

For the Potions Master’s Amusement

Chapter 69: Revisiting

The house was larger than the word ‘cottage’ might have led one to believe, and Hermione stopped on the stone-paved walkway to admire it. It was a brilliant, unseasonably warm autumn day, the sky a faultless blue, and the trees in the front garden wore their autumn glory of red and gold leaves. The house was a bit rambling, as if it had been added-on to at different times, with steeply-pitched gables and gingerbread trim. The front door opened, and Taffy Lestrange rushed through with a squeal, enveloping Hermione in a fragrant hug.

‘You’re here!’ she cried, rocking Hermione gently back and forth in her arms. ‘I’m so glad you came!’

Hermione returned the hug, ignoring the prickle of tears she felt. ‘It’s wonderful to see you,’ she whispered into t’s fair hair.

Taffy stepped back, holding Hermione at arm’s length and giving her a thorough looking-over. ‘How pretty you look!’ she said, linking arms with Hermione and leading her toward the door. ‘You’ve got so thin! I envy you. The baby made me fat!’ She gestured at herself with a rueful face.

‘You’re radiant,’ Hermione said firmly. ‘Motherhood suits you.’

‘Let’s find the others!’ t exclaimed, and pulled her friend through the door.

As they crossed the threshold, Hermione noticed that the sign above the lintel said ‘Odd Cottage’, and then they were in the entrance hall, where steps led up to the first floor.

‘Everyone is gathered in the back garden,’ t said excitedly. ‘Leave your bag here, by the stairs, and we’ll put it in your room later.’

Hermione left her travelling bag and allowed t to tug her down the corridor, through a big, country kitchen, where two house-elves were busy with food preparations, and out a door into the sunshine again.

The back garden was large and well laid-out, dominated just now by a central bed of bronze chrysanthemums. Smaller beds of asters and pansies, still in bloom in the October Indian summer, flanked a marble fountain, and guests were scattered about in small groups, their hands occupied with cups of tea and plates of cake.

‘Everyone will be so happy to see you,’ t said. ‘It’s been too long!’

Hermione forced a smile and drew a deep, steadying breath. There’s nothing to be afraid of, she counselled herself. These people are your friends.
Rafe hurried across the grass, a wide smile splitting his handsome, bearded face. He appeared to be fully recovered from his stay in Azkaban, for his grey Muggle suit fit him well, and the burly physique at which his body had only hinted when first she had met him was now in robust evidence. With the silver-streaked dark hair hanging over his collar, he might have passed for an aging rock star, dressed for a visit with his banker. Hermione extended her hand with a welcoming smile, but Rafe engulfed her in a bear hug, spinning her around once before putting her back on the ground.

‘Welcome to our home!’ he said, pulling t to his side with one possessive arm. ‘We are very happy to have you with us.’

‘Thanks,’ Hermione said. ‘I’m sorry I couldn’t come before now.’

‘Well, you had to train for your new job,’ t said, taking Hermione’s hand and giving it a squeeze.

‘Where did they send you for training?’ Rafe asked curiously.

‘I spent six weeks in America,’ Hermione told him. She glanced at t, who still held her hand. ‘I’m so sorry I wasn’t here when the baby was born.’

Taffy smiled tenderly. ‘You’re here now, and that’s what matters.’

Rafe reached out and scooped Hermione against his other side, walking both witches toward a couple standing beneath a fiery Japanese maple. ‘Let’s take you to meet Her Highness,’ he said, and Hermione could not fail to hear the pride in his voice.

As they drew near, Rafe hailed the couple, who turned to greet them, and Hermione saw it was Vi and Claudius. Vi was glowing, her blond hair wound into a very chic chignon, her pale mauve, jacketed dress and elegant high heels giving her the appearance of a young matron dressed for High Tea. But the most arresting thing about Vi was the small but evident swell of her tummy.

‘Look at you!’ Hermione cried with delight, returning Vi’s hug. ‘You’re pregnant!’ she added in a whisper.

‘Not just that,’ Vi whispered back, and as Hermione stepped back, Vi extended her left hand, where she wore a wedding ring.

‘Congratulations!’ Hermione breathed, admiring the platinum band set with diamonds. ‘I can’t believe you didn’t write me about this!’

Vi smiled radiantly. ‘We just went down to the Ministry one day and signed the register, really. I didn’t want a fuss.’

‘And you didn’t get one,’ Hermione replied softly. ‘You got a husband and a baby, instead.’

‘Master is so good with babies,’ Vi said happily, and Hermione turned then to see that Master Claudius held a tiny figure wrapped in a pale yellow blanket—one Vi had crocheted, as she recalled.

‘Come to Mummy, sweeting,’ t cooed, and Claudius relinquished the baby to her mother. ‘Isn’t she a love?’
Hermione looked down into the tiny face, noting the delicate, blue-veined eyelids and the minute rosebud mouth, and she stroked one finger down the sleeping baby’s face.

‘Hullo, Daisy,’ Hermione said. ‘Aren’t you a pretty girl?’

‘That she is,’ Rafe affirmed, ‘and if she’s lucky, she may one day grow to be as lovely as her mother, eh, Princess?’

Taffy turned her eyes to Rafe’s, and the two exchanged a look of such intensity that Hermione was driven to look away.

‘How do you do, Hermione?’ Claudius inquired, and he took her hand between both of his, looking down into her face with keen, searching eyes.

‘I’m well, sir. Thank you,’ Hermione replied.

Taffy settled the baby in the curve of one arm and touched Hermione’s shoulder. ‘I want you to meet my parents,’ she said, and excusing herself to the others, Hermione accompanied her friend across the grass. ‘They’re the reason we’ve gone all Muggle-ish for the day.’

Hermione looked at her sharply. ‘You’re Muggle-born?’ she gasped.

Taffy smiled. ‘Yes, just like you.’

‘No wonder Rafe’s family disapproved of you,’ Hermione murmured.

‘Really,’ t said, ‘they never knew. Our marriage was always a secret from them. Then Rafe lost both brothers and his sister-in-law in the last battle. His parents were already gone, and the Ministry confiscated the family properties and their Gringott’s vault as part of the investigation after the war. We may receive some portion of the gold back in time, but the Ministry can claim it as reparations, considering how the Lestranges supported the Dark Lord for so long.’

Hermione nodded. ‘That must be very uncomfortable for you, though.’

‘Oh no,’ t assured her. ‘Rafe’s money came from his mother’s family—no Death Eater connections there.’

Hermione met Mr and Mrs Smith, very friendly people from Shrewsbury, in Shropshire, where they ran a chemist shop. Mrs Smith, the picture of a doting grandmother, took charge of Daisy, and soon Rafe joined them.

‘Must be getting along, now,’ he said, tapping his wristwatch. ‘We’re expected by half-two.’

The church, as one might expect for a village of this size, was quite small, but very picturesque. Hermione was delighted to see Kell and Reg, both in Muggle clothing, waiting out front. She fairly flew down the path to embrace Kell, both of them laughing and talking at once.

‘What about me?’ Reggie complained after a moment. ‘Don’t I get a hug?’
Hermione turned to give him a quick kiss on the cheek. ‘Don’t you get enough attention at home?’ she teased.

Reg turned his gaze to Kell, and Kell looked adoringly into his face until her cheeks were flushed with colour.

‘I find my home life very … satisfying,’ he said, still looking at his submissive. ‘Now, if you’ll excuse me, I’ll have a word with Rafe.’

Hermione couldn’t help a giggle of sheer delight. ‘Look at you!’ she said, linking arms with Kell and leading her aside.

Kell giggled too, her eyes shining. ‘I’m so happy,’ she admitted. ‘We meant to be there for the garden party, but … time got away from us.’

Hermione grinned and gave Kell another impulsive hug. ‘I’m so happy for you,’ she said. ‘I guess the training with Hadrian has gone well?’

Kell nodded once. ‘Master spent weekends at Roissy House for several months—all through the spring and summer—and on party weekends, I would go, too. It’s been wonderful, Hermione—he’s just the same, our Reggie, you know, but with a difference that …’

She broke off, and Hermione felt a terrific tug of envy at the look of rapture on her friend’s face.

‘I see,’ Hermione said simply, for she did. She knew precisely what Kell meant and how she felt.

Kell’s fingers touched her throat, bare above the demure neckline of her sapphire blue frock. ‘He wouldn’t collar me until Master Hadrian was satisfied with his progress,’ she confided. ‘I feel naked without it now, though.’

Hermione scarcely had time to nod sympathetically before Kell hurried on. ‘Master told me once that you were the one who told him he should take training, Hermione.’ Kell took her hand. ‘You weren’t the first to tell him, but when you did, he finally took notice. Thank you.’

Hermione drew a sharp breath, feeling tears threaten again. She had thought she might feel some envy, seeing her submissive friends with their Masters, but she hadn’t realised how emotional their reunion would be.

‘Don’t be silly,’ she said, speaking past the lump in her throat with some difficulty. ‘I didn’t do a thing. You and he have healed your relationship on your own, with no help from me.’ She managed a smile. ‘Good job, too!’

Kell giggled. ‘Thanks,’ she said. ‘Now, go to see Hadrian and Elinore—they’re inside!’

Hermione passed into the church foyer, which seemed quite dark after the bright sunshine, and down the central aisle. She was surprised to see Elinore seated in a Muggle-style wheelchair, and she hurried forward to kneel beside the older witch.

‘My dear,’ Elinore said, reaching to touch Hermione’s hair. ‘I’m very happy that you came.’

Hadrian sat at the end of pew beside Elinore’s chair, and he stood, taking Hermione’s hand and assisting her to rise.
‘Hello,’ he said simply, his intense eyes never leaving her face, and as at their first meeting, Hermione was struck by the resemblance of his manner and serious expression to that of …

Without speaking, Hermione moved to embrace Hadrian, and he received her into his arms, allowing her to draw what comfort she might from his nearness—as if he knew what she needed, and why. When she stepped away from him again, she felt somehow soothed.

‘Thank you,’ she mouthed, though the words were soundless, and Hadrian inclined his head, accepting her thanks as his due.

Elinore began to speak lightly of baby Daisy and of Vi’s pregnancy, as if she felt the need to cover an awkward pause in the conversation. Hermione listened with half an ear, her attention all for Hadrian, who seemed to hold himself ready for her—as if he were expecting her to say … to ask … something.

There were so many things swirling about in Hermione’s mind that she felt a bit outside of herself, almost as if she were watching herself from a distance. She had thought she had left behind the feeling of being without an essential part of herself, for she hadn’t been troubled by the acute sensation of loss for weeks, now. But seeing the inhabitants of Roissy House and seeing how they interacted with one another had stirred up a storm of emotion in her—had made it seem suddenly reasonable to make an inquiry which she had forbidden herself ever to broach.

When Elinore reached a pause in her gentle discourse, Hermione wetted her lips and addressed Hadrian. ‘Sir, do you know—’

‘There you are!’ Rafe said, coming up behind her. ‘Sorry to interrupt, Elinore, but I must borrow Hermione—time to introduce her to the vicar, show her where to stand and all, you know.’

‘Of course, dear,’ Elinore said, with a gentle wave of her hand.

Hadrian paid no mind to Rafe, but spoke to Hermione. ‘Chin up.’

Before she had time to wonder what Hadrian had meant, Rafe led her up to the front of the building and left her standing by the font.

‘I lost t somewhere along the way,’ he muttered distractedly, turning to look for her. ‘There she is, talking to the vicar’s wife.’ He strode off in her direction, saying over his shoulder, ‘Wait for me there, won’t you, Hermione?’

Hermione murmured in the affirmative and smoothed her palms down her brown velveteen skirt, making sure her blouse was neatly tucked in the waistband. Absently, she gazed out at the people coming in and finding places to sit. She was surprised to see so many Muggles at the christening of a wizard baby, but t was a regular church-goer, so presumably, she had a number of Muggle acquaintances. It was true, other than the house-elves, Hermione had seen nothing in Odd Cottage to indicate that the inhabitants were wizards. She smiled to herself, thinking how much Rafe’s brothers would have abhorred the life he had chosen to lead.

Claudius entered the sanctuary with his wife on his arm, followed by Reg and Kell, their arms about each other’s waists, and Hermione felt her heart lurch. Dear God, she had known it would unsettle her to come here, but she couldn’t miss the christening of t’s baby. She had promised to stand godmother to Daisy long before her life had taken a drastic turn for the … not for the worse, really,
but for the different, certainly.

It was so tempting to watch these submissive women, happy with their Masters, and imagine herself in their midst, participating in their felicity. Unlike the disconnect she felt when she watched Harry with Ginny, or Ronald with his flavour-of-the-week, seeing a Dominant and his submissive together felt right to her. She could easily see herself among them, part of their society, and the sensation she had felt earlier of being outside herself persisted. For months, she had forbidden herself to indulge in these sorts of fantasies, but here, with these people, it seemed the most natural thing in the world.

The hush that seemed to fall over the assembled guests was surely a trick of her imagination, for it was easy enough to see that they continued to move about and chat with one another—but Hermione’s ability to hear them was impaired as her full attention was drawn to the central sanctuary door. The main doors to the church had been opened, and the afternoon sunshine flooded into the foyer, limning the dark figure at the sanctuary entrance in blinding light. The sounds of the people beginning to take their seats; of the Lestranges and the vicar walking up to stand beside Hermione at the font; of Rafe making an introduction to the vicar, to which Hermione failed to respond; all of these things were drowned out by the pulsation of her heart, echoing in her head like the unrelenting beat of a drum.

The figure in the doorway started forward, having seemingly determined upon a destination, and it was clear then that it was a man, striding up the aisle of the church as if he strode between the Slytherin and Ravenclaw tables in the Great Hall—or indeed, down the aisle between the work tables in the dungeon Potions classroom.

Hermione reached out to steady herself upon the font dais, and clasped her hand, twining their fingers and holding on tightly. The man came closer, and Hermione saw the austere black suit with white shirt and deep burgundy necktie, the raven’s-wing black of the hair hanging on either side of the narrow face, and then there were only the black eyes, staring into her own, riveting her wordlessly where she stood.

With a breathless slam! Hermione was fully present in her own body again, experiencing all the symptoms of the fight-or-flight syndrome, right down to the tunnel vision which prevented her from looking away. Her face drained of colour, her heart raced, her hands shook, and it was only the supreme exercise of will that permitted her to hear Rafe speak to the vicar.

‘Ah, we’re all here now! Please meet my daughter’s godfather, Professor Severus Snape.’

‘Greetings,’ the vicar said, but Professor Snape’s only answer was a terse nod of the head.

He had eyes for no one but Hermione.
Hermione fought to draw breath as she stared across the font at Severus Snape, who held her gaze, his own face impassive—but his eyes burned, and her skin, her heart … and her soul? … felt scorched.

How foolish could she have been? Had she really convinced herself that he would not be there because no one had specifically told her he would?

And why didn’t you ask anyone? a snide inner voice demanded. Could it be that you didn’t want to know? Because sure, as long as she could say she didn’t know, then no one could accuse her of wanting to see him, could they?

Who else would Rafe even have considered to ask to be Daisy’s godfather? No one, that’s who! Oh, she was a nitwit, certainly … or a self-deluder of alarming magnitude.

She was tending toward the latter.

‘Shall we get started?’ the vicar asked, and the service began.

‘Are you sure you won’t stay for dinner, Sev?’ Rafe asked, clapping his friend upon the shoulder and waving good-bye to the limousine carrying the Hunters and the Claudius family away from the church.

Hermione shifted backwards a step, wondering if she could somehow rescind her acceptance of the Lestranges’ hospitality for the weekend, but t took her hand again, holding her firmly in place.

Hermione gave her hand a tug, but t did not release her.

‘What’s going on?’ Hermione demanded crossly, sotto voce.

Taffy responded to this ungracious question with perfect serenity. ‘It’s time to face up to things like a grown-up,’ she said gently. ‘No more hiding and no more running.’

Hermione opened her mouth to retort, and the professor pivoted and looked at her. ‘I would be delighted to stay for dinner, if t will have me.’ He raised a rather mocking eyebrow at t, who smiled and started forward, bringing Hermione with her.

‘I’m serving all your favourites, you know,’ she said, and as she passed Severus to reach Rafe, she released Hermione’s hand.

Severus looked impressed. ‘You roasted a goose for me? It’s not even Christmas.’

Taffy’s laughter floated back as she wrapped an arm about her husband’s waist. Rafe pulled the blanket more closely about the face of his newly-baptised daughter and set off at a leisurely pace on the walk back to Odd Cottage.

‘Shall we, Miss Granger?’ Professor Snape inquired mildly, addressing Hermione directly for the first time, but she scuttled away from him, hurrying to walk alongside t.
Without making any fuss, the professor took the place beside Rafe, and the four walked on through the early twilight.

The Smiths were present at dinner, and it became apparent that Severus Snape was a favourite with t’s parents. He sat at his ease beside t’s mum and across from her dad, his hawkish face animated, and carried on an involved discussion of the similarities and differences between the Muggles’ chemist shops and the wizards’ apothecaries. Hermione allowed her hair to fall forward, and using his trick, she watched him from behind it, eating little. Dragging her eyes back to her plate, she pushed her potatoes and runner beans around and darted a smile to t.

‘No wonder you could go to work in an apothecary,’ she said.

Taffy nodded. ‘When it was time for Severus to find a way to hide me in plain sight, it was a lucky thing for me that I’d worked summers in the shop,’ she agreed. ‘It made it easier for him to find a job for me.’

‘But couldn’t you have stayed here?’ Hermione asked, looking around at the pleasant dining room, with its persimmon damask draperies and matching carpets, the fine old polished wood of the table and sideboard, the burnished silver of the serving pieces.

‘My husband wanted me to be safely hidden, on the off chance that his family discovered my existence—and besides, I couldn’t bear the idea of just sitting and waiting,’ Taffy directed a frank look at Hermione. ‘Haven’t you found that work is preferable to a lack of occupation while waiting for time to pass?’

Hermione closed her mouth resolutely rather than utter the heated rejoinder which rose to her lips. When had t become so stern? Hermione was used to receiving loving indulgence from her friend, not hard home-truths. She resumed moving food from one side of her plate to the other, only becoming aware of Rafe’s measuring regard in the moment before he spoke to his father-in-law.

‘Won’t you come to the study to try some of my new cognac?’ Rafe said, and the gentlemen excused themselves and left the room.

Hermione watched them file out, Professor Snape stopping at the doorway to allow t’s father to go first, and then he looked directly at her, as if he had known she would be watching him. Her heart skipped a beat before beginning to race, and she looked away. When she glanced back, he had gone.

‘Taffy dear, I believe I’ll have an early bath,’ Mrs Smith said. ‘Your father and I want to get an early start in the morning.’

‘Of course, Mummy,’ Taffy said, rising from her chair. ‘Let’s make sure you have everything you need.’

Abandoned, Hermione wandered into the sitting room and sat down on the sofa near the fire. The day had been quite fine, but the evening was rather chilly, and the fire was nice. She was staring morosely into the flames when t came into the room and sat down close beside her, tucking a hand through Hermione’s arm and giving it a squeeze.

‘You’re angry with me,’ t said calmly.

Hermione frowned and sighed. ‘I’m not really angry,’ she said. ‘I’m more confused, than anything. Why wouldn’t Vi or Kell talk to me after the christening? Claudius and Reg marched them off as if I were contaminated or something. Even Elinore wouldn’t do more than press my hand and tell me to be a “brave girl”.’
Taffy nodded. ‘I wasn’t told by any of them, but I suspect they were under orders from their Masters to leave you alone once Severus arrived.’

‘But why?’ Hermione asked. ‘That makes no sense!’

‘Well,’ t said, ‘as long as you stayed away, your reticence was respected. If you chose to sever your ties to the Roissy House community, then everyone honoured your decision. But by coming here this weekend, by greeting and hugging and catching up with everyone, your behaviour showed a desire to continue your association with us—with the D/s community. Do you see?’ Taffy watched her with soft, steady eyes.

Hermione shook her head. ‘Not really,’ she said. ‘This is all news to me—I had no idea that my decisions of where to go and whom to talk to were being monitored in such a way.’

‘Well, you didn’t directly tell us anything, did you?’ t said gently. ‘And we weren’t going to trespass on your privacy to ask you. We felt that when you were ready, you would either tell us that you were leaving us, or you would resolve your issues and come back to us.’

‘So coming here this weekend was seen as my return to the D/s community?’ Hermione asked, perplexed.

‘Of course,’ t affirmed. ‘Haven’t you?’

And as much as Hermione wanted to deny it, the thread of honesty in her would not permit it. She wanted to be one of them.

Taking her silence as assent, t continued, ‘And since you’ve come back to us, it also means it’s time for you to allow Severus some closure.’

Hermione jerked away as if she’d been burned, jumping to her feet and staring down at t.

‘What are you talking about?’ she cried.

‘Hermione,’ t said steadily, ‘you wore his collar. You ended your relationship rather abruptly and forbade him to contact you. He’s honoured your request explicitly, but that doesn’t mean he’s at peace with what occurred between you.’

Hermione felt panic rising, unable to begin to imagine a conversation alone with the professor. Had she thought she was healed? Had she thought she was ready to see him again, to speak to him again—to discuss their relationship and how it had ended?

Fuck no she wasn’t ready for that! Not for any of it!

Taffy sat forward, to the edge of the sofa cushion. ‘Do you remember what you and Vi and Elinore said to Kell the night Reg came to see her, after their last quarrel?’

‘No,’ Hermione cried. ‘I don’t remember what we said to her—it was months ago! And you weren’t even there, so how do you know?’

Taffy stood and moved closer, so that Hermione was forced to look into her face. ‘I know because it was important, and everyone told me all about it,’ she said. ‘First, Vi told Kell that Reggie’s request to talk to her wasn’t unreasonable, because things were not resolved between them.’

Hermione’s eyes widened as she remembered.
‘Second, Elinore told her that you can’t play with a Dom and love with a Dom and quarrel with him without ever talking things out—that grown-up people sort out their troubles, for better or worse.’

Hermione tried to step away, but t took a firm hold on her wrist.

‘And you, Hermione—you told her that it had taken a lot of courage for him to come back, and that the least she could do was to talk to him.’

Now t released her, and Hermione was able to stumble back from her, fear and anxiety rolling through her like waves at high tide.

‘Come to bed, little one.’

Rafe stood in the doorway, one hand held out imperiously for his submissive.

‘Yes, Master,’ t said, going to him obediently.

Rafe allowed his gaze to fall on Hermione’s face. ‘Be the brave girl you are,’ he said softly. ‘Do the right thing.’

The Lestranges exited the room hand in hand, and Hermione saw who had been waiting behind Rafe: Severus Snape, now minus his suit coat and necktie, the French cuffs of his sleeves folded up to show his forearms, the column of his throat visible at the open neck of the shirt. He watched her warily from the hallway.

‘May I come in?’ he asked diffidently.

She shrugged awkwardly. ‘You’re a guest here, just as I am,’ she said.

He entered the room and approached her, stopping two feet away. He was thinner than she remembered, his black eyes shadowed, the lines between his brows more pronounced, the ones bracketing his thin lips longer and deeper than they had been. Even so, he filled the room with his presence, making it all but impossible for her to draw breath—and when she finally did, taking a great gulp of air into her lungs, she was overwhelmed with the aroma of his aftershave.

Scent memories flooded her, more acute and detailed than anything which had plagued her dreams. She was helpless, assaulted on every side by sights and sounds and feelings she could not combat, and the longing which followed was a pain far too great to be borne.

‘Hello, Hermione,’ he said quietly.

‘I can’t do this,’ she whispered, her voice strangled, and she bolted from the room, racing blindly for the stairs.
Chapter 71

For the Potions Master’s Amusement

Chapter 71: Freefall

An hour of quiet reflection did nothing to calm her nerves. If she had known at the outset that attending Daisy’s christening equated to an agreement to have a private talk with Severus Snape, she never would have come. What could he want to know? What could she possibly say?

She was tempted to Disapparate to her flat, but she had no desire to offend and Rafe. Oh, why had she come?

She sat on the edge of her bed and cradled her head in her hands. All these months of walling off her emotions and forcing herself not to think about Severus Snape or their relationship and how it ended, and now she was trapped in the same house with him and more or less under the gun to talk to him about it.

His proximity excited her—well, physically, their interactions had always been phenomenal, hadn’t they? —but she had no idea how she could discuss with him the whys and wherefores of her decision to leave him. She was certain she had done the right thing; he had never accorded her the status of full-fledged adult in their interactions, had he? Always, there had been that power imbalance, of him as the adult and her as the child.

He had insisted on making decisions for her without consulting her about it, and as a result, she had been separated from Harry and Ron when they most needed her, and she had not been present at Roissy House to help defend her friends when the Death Eaters invaded. As a result, Kell had very nearly lost her life. In her heart of hearts, Hermione blamed Severus for that.

Frustrated, she extinguished the light and lay down upon the top of the bedcovers, fully clothed. She resolutely closed her eyes and told herself to sleep—but neither her body nor her mind were willing to listen to that. Just below where she lay, Severus Snape sat before a fire in his shirtsleeves, all silky voice and slender fingers and thin, lithe body beneath his clothes …

No! No, she wouldn’t think of those things. Better not to think at all.

She sat up abruptly, switching on the light, and she slipped her feet into her shoes. She rifled through her bag for the books she had packed, but she could not find them anywhere. Where were they? She searched the bedside table and the dresser. Had she unpacked them and forgotten?

But a thorough search of her room did not reveal her books, and she huffed in annoyance. Well, somewhere downstairs was Rafe’s study, and surely there were books on the shelves—otherwise, why would it be called a study?

She made her way stealthily down the stairs to the entrance hall, and a quick peek inside the sitting room assured her that the professor was not sitting morosely before the fire—thank Merlin for small favours! Continuing down the corridor, she came to a room with its door ajar, and she slipped inside, noting the book-filled shelves by the ambient light in the room. Excellent!

She lit the tip of her wand and began to examine the bookcases, shelf by shelf, and she lost herself in the smell of the book-bindings and the parchment within them, debating which of the books she most wished to carry back to her room.
‘Luckily for you, I am not an enemy wishing for an opportunity to attack,’ a musing voice commented from across the room, and Hermione spun to see Severus Snape seated on the cushioned window seat, his hooked nose silhouetted by the moonlight as he gazed out at the night.

‘I didn’t see you!’ she gasped.

He did not look her way, but he did not need to do so for her to hear the sneer as he replied, ‘Obviously.’

She swallowed, feeling annoyingly wrong-footed. ‘I thought you were in the sitting room.’

Now his head swivelled, and she was pinned by his regard. ‘No, you were far more likely to come into this room, seeking reading material,’ he said evenly.

‘How did you know that?’ she demanded.

A half-smile curved his lips. ‘I know you well,’ he murmured.

‘You came in here because you thought I would?’ she persisted.

‘Yes,’ he said simply.

Hermione sighed, feeling defeated. ‘All right,’ she said resignedly.

He stood, facing her. Even with only the faint moonlight for a backlight, she could see the sharp contrast between the breadth of his shoulders and the slimness of his hips, and her breath caught in her throat.

‘All right?’ he queried.

She gave her head a shake, annoyed with the ongoing battle between attraction and irritation which raged in her psyche. With a snort of exasperation, she lit the nearest candelabra with a flick of her wrist and flounced to the sofa in the middle of the room, flopping onto it. ‘All right,’ she snapped. ‘Fine. Talk.’

She glared straight ahead, no longer feeling panic or fear, only aggravation. And deep within, there was a spark of pleasure that she could be this close to this man without feeling overwhelmed by him.

‘I see,’ he said, sounding somewhat bemused but taking her at her word, he trod across the floor and seated himself beside her on the sofa, turning slightly so that he faced her.

Hermione darted an alarmed glance at him from the corner of her eye, and she saw him extend his arm along the top of the sofa, his fingers stopping just shy of her shoulder. A cold chill ran up her spine, her skin all over gooseflesh … her nipples suddenly crinkled and aching against the fabric of her plain cotton bra.

‘Have you been well?’ he asked, as if he were her doctor and she was in for her annual check-up.

She crossed her arms over her breasts, hoping he hadn’t noticed anything. ‘Don’t I look well?’ she said belligerently.

‘I can’t say that you do,’ he said mildly. ‘You’re too thin, your eyes are shadowed, and you’re a bit pale.’

She turned angrily. ‘I could say the same for you!’
His eyes widened slightly when she turned, but he recovered quickly, inclining his head slowly in acknowledgment of the truth of her comment. Then he said, ‘Of course, you are still quite lovely.’

Hermione felt the moment when her eyes locked with his; there was very nearly an audible click in her mind as it happened, and some of her bravado leached away. She didn’t know what to say to that, so she didn’t reply.

‘Did you score an Outstanding in each of your NEWTs?’ he asked, covering the awkward pause.

‘Yes.’

He nodded, as if this were exactly what he had expected. ‘I understand that you have a new job,’ he commented. ‘Rafe informs me that you endured six weeks of training in America—for which you have my complete sympathy—but he could not tell me what sort of work you are doing.’

Ah, this was safe terrain. She relaxed slightly. She had been explaining her job to everyone she met for weeks, now—there was nothing to fear in this conversation. ‘I’m still in training, actually,’ she said. ‘I’m one of a team of information technology engineers, setting up the new computer systems at the Ministry of Magic.’

His eyebrows arched. ‘I’ve been reading about you in the newspaper without knowing it,’ he said. ‘You and your fellows were hired at a premium salary, from what I understand—far beyond the means of a schoolteacher’s pay.’

Hermione heard a note of hesitation in his voice, but she tried to ignore it. Did he dislike it that she was paid a higher salary then he was? ‘Yes,’ Hermione agreed, ‘I was very fortunate to be chosen.’

He nodded. ‘You’ll not be in need of monetary assistance,’ he observed.

Did he think she had enjoyed taking his gold to buy things? Had he thought she would ask him again? Not bloody likely! ‘I never was,’ she answered sharply.

His eyes strayed momentarily to her lips, then rose again to her eyes. ‘Indeed,’ he said, and for some reason, Hermione’s heart rate increased. His subsequent words proved that her premonition of danger was accurate, for he segued seamlessly into his next question.

‘Perhaps,’ he said, ‘you could tell me more about your decision to return your collar to me.’

In an instant, she felt sick with dread, and she saw how she had been lulled into thinking he would ask nothing but idle questions of her. ‘I told you my reasons then,’ she pointed out.

‘I recall,’ he said, with a wry twist of his lips. ‘I thought you might be able to elaborate for me on your points of dissatisfaction.’ His voice dropped, in both volume and timbre, and Hermione’s body reacted as if his hands were upon her flesh. ‘I cannot hope to learn from my mistakes, you see, if I do not fully understand them.’

His eyes bored into hers, and she felt unable to tear her gaze away, even though her hands began to tremble, and a tone seemed to thrum through her lower body, as of a stringed instrument, expertly plucked.

‘You had no respect for my abilities,’ she said, speaking quickly, fighting to think clearly over the traitorous reactions of her nervous system. ‘Yes, you acknowledged my intellect, but you had no faith in my abilities to duel or to protect my friends.’
His lips, thin but beautifully formed, pursed for a moment, and Hermione had a sudden, piercing memory of her clitoris sucked into his mouth between those lips, his tongue teasing her to the point of insanity.

‘What if,’ he asked, bringing her back to their conversation, ‘my reticence to see you fight had nothing to do with my faith in your abilities to do so, but everything to do with my desire to keep you safe?’

His tone was mild, inquiring, as if they were discussing a theory of some sort, rather than the dissolution of their love affair.

Hermione swallowed, dragging her eyes from his mouth, just as he had done, earlier, and she wondered briefly if he had been picturing her lips fastened about his cock as he fucked her mouth …

‘That wasn’t the point, was it?’ she asked, and the heat in his gaze told her he knew her mind had wandered from the stated topic of their discussion. ‘The point is that you made my obedience in that area a part of our contract with one another without my consent—I never agreed to allow you control over my efforts in the war, did I?’

He appeared to consider this, his tongue darting out to moisten his lips, and Hermione shuddered deep inside as she clenched the arm of the sofa, her knuckles white, to keep herself from leaning over to touch her tongue to his …

‘And might not we have discussed your concern, I wonder?’ he asked. ‘Could we not have renegotiated our agreement to our mutual—’ his eyes flicked down, roving over her chest, where her aching, erect nipples pressed against the thin layers of her bra and her blouse, up to her throat, where her pulse beat violently beneath the edge of her jaw, to her lips, slightly parted as she took light, panting breaths, until coming to rest again on her eyes ‘—satisfaction?’

His fingertips now brushed against the strands of her hair, though how he had drawn nearer to her she did not know. He hadn’t moved, she was sure of it. Had she scooted closer to him?

Hermione swallowed. ‘It didn’t seem so,’ she whispered, trying desperately to hang on to her reasoning mind, pushing against her wildly rising excitement, but feeling as if she were beating upon unresponsive rock with bare fists. She looked away from him, staring down at her knees. ‘It seemed as if you had made up your mind, and my choices were either to obey or suffer your displeasure. I was not aware of my … right to request a renegotiation.’

The fingers recently playing at the tips of her hair were on the collar of her shirt now, beneath her hair, rubbing comforting circles through the fabric, against her skin. How could that be? she wondered vaguely, fighting the urge to arch into his touch and purr like a cat.

‘Hermione,’ he breathed, and she was startled to feel his breath upon her temple.

Dear God, how was he doing this, making the safe distance she had placed between them disappear, without either of them moving a muscle? She glanced up and found his eyes, black as India ink, fastened upon her face.

‘I could try to justify my behaviour with you—believe me, I have done, and Hadrian has scorned my excuses to silence—but the truth of the matter is, I did not properly educate you before I accepted your offer of submission and placed my collar about your neck.’

His fingertips now were upon her nape, soothing, massaging, even as his voice insinuated itself into her. It crept in through her parted lips, her open eyes, through the very pores of her skin, until she
was bound up, a sealed vessel filling with urgency, her skin feeling ready to burst with needful anticipation.

‘I told you then I was a selfish bastard, thinking, perhaps, that those words in some way excused my actions—but you had no authority for anything I did or asked you to do except for my word and the book written by Master Maximus and I.’

Now his entire hand, not only his fingertips, massaged the back of her neck, and she pressed gently back against those clever fingers, a murmur of pleasure on her lips, even as she absorbed his words. So, he had spoken of their break-up to Hadrian, and the older Dominant had taken the professor to task for collaring her too soon …

‘As Hadrian reminded me, it is proper procedure for a neophyte submissive to have a submissive mentor when she is new to the lifestyle. It was one thing for me to begin the training for Jacqueline and Diana at school, because I then took them to Roissy House and established them with a network of submissives while I sought a Dominant to continue their training. It was something completely different to collar you without giving you an opportunity to find your feet in the D/s community.’

The fingers beneath her hair became still, the warmth of his hand cupping the back of her neck. Slowly, she opened her eyes and looked at him.

‘If I’d had a mentor,’ she said, ‘you would have followed the rules in your dealings with me.’

She watched in some amazement as dull red touched his sallow cheeks, and he seemed to recollect himself, for he removed his hand from her skin and rested it on the edge of the sofa back.

‘I allowed my desire to possess you to overcome my training as a Dominant. I allowed my fear that you would be killed to convince me that it was right to use any means, fair or foul, to coerce you into remaining safe.’ He paused for a moment, as if dreading to speak the next words. At last he said, ‘I used your trust in me to manipulate you into doing what I wanted.’

He stood suddenly, and Hermione blinked in surprise that he was able to break free of the tether which held them so close together. He stared down at her, his eyes bleak, his nostrils flaring as he drew breath, his lips pressed into a tight, straight line.

‘I failed you in every way a man can fail a woman, and in every way a Dominant can fail a submissive,’ he stated, his voice stern, and as she watched, he straightened to his full height. ‘I’ll not ask your forgiveness, for the things I have done are unpardonable, but I will give you my heartfelt apology, for I owe it to you.’ He made a fist with his right hand and placed it over his heart, then bowed from the waist, his lank hair falling forward in a sweeping arc.

Before he had fully righted himself, Hermione was on her feet. How had this meeting changed tenor so quickly? He had been actively seducing her, moving closer to her, touching her, soothing her with his hands, lulling her with his voice, and speaking the words she had so desperately needed to hear. And now he was making his apologies and taking his leave?

Like hell he was!

‘What about me?’ she demanded. ‘What about the things I did wrong? You haven’t mentioned one of those.’

His hands fell to his sides, and he watched her with a crease between his brows. ‘It is not my place to speak of such things,’ he informed her stiffly. ‘I am here only to say to you the things which should have been said long ago.’
She placed her hands on her hips. ‘How about the fact that I said I would submit to you and then disobeyed you? I said I would remain safe and then I repeatedly put myself in danger.’

His eyes narrowed slightly. ‘I see no point in discussing that,’ he said flatly.

Fury swelled in her chest, righteous anger electrifying her, and it was as if she were standing again in the reception room at Roissy House, having to explain to him that she was as much a part of their relationship as he was.

She stepped forward pugnaciously. ‘You’re doing it again,’ she accused. ‘Acting as if it’s all about you and not at all about me!’

He opened his lips to reply, but she forestalled him with one finger poked against his sternum, and her words came out in a rush.

‘I am not blameless in what happened with us, so don’t pretend to yourself that I am. I didn’t question you enough, didn’t require enough explanation of the things you said and asked me to do. I accepted your word. I needed what you gave me so much I didn’t question where it came from or why.’

His hand came up and captured the finger pointed at his chest, encompassing her entire hand. ‘That was only natural for you,’ he replied quietly, his eyes darkening. ‘You’re a born submissive, Hermione, and it was your bad fortune to come across a Dominant who failed to cultivate and develop your gifts.’ He drew an unsteady breath. ‘It is the duty of the Dominant not only to provide for the physical needs of the submissive, but also to nurture her emotionally and educate her intellectually. I may have succeeded in the first area—’

‘You did!’ she threw at him, almost as if it were a challenge.

He pressed on, determinedly. ‘But I failed you miserably in both of the other areas where it was my responsibility to provide for you,’ he finished. ‘Any improper behaviour from you was nothing but a demonstration of how poorly I had instructed you.’

Hermione’s heart, mind, and body were a morass of raging, conflicting emotions, thoughts, and impulses. He attracted her to him, as he had always done, with his physicality, that je ne sais quoi which set him apart from every other man she had ever known. But at the same time, he pushed her from him with his words, his intractable attitude, and his bloody-minded determination to make the break-up all about him. She was too overwrought to respond to him on any level but the most primal, aided by her impudent tongue.

‘So now what?’ she demanded. ‘You walk out, all warm and fuzzy in the knowledge that you’ve done your damn duty by me?’ She put on a deep voice and said with fake jollity, ‘Sorry for fucking up your life, Hermione. Cheerio!’

His eyes flashed at her insolent tone, and his hold on her hand tightened. ‘Do not imagine that you can manipulate me with your play-acting,’ he said dangerously.

Her need blazed up in her like fire, responding to the warning in his tone. ‘You owe me!’ she insisted. ‘You know you do!’

They stood facing one another in Rafe’s study, both breathing as if they had been physically sparring, staring into each other’s eyes like opposing wildcats, each determined not to be the first to blink. Hermione had no idea what she was doing, what she hoped to accomplish, but something within her drove her to push him, push him as far as she could, uncaring of what the consequences of
her actions might be.

As she stared at him, thinking it would be a miracle if he did not break the bones of the hand he held in his vise-like grip, he visibly calmed himself, his breathing evening out, his grasp lessening until he had released her hand, the stern lines of his face relaxing to the expression he had presented her when first she had seen him that afternoon, in the nave of the church.

‘All right, Hermione,’ he said quietly. ‘What do you require of me? How can I be of service?’

Dimly, it occurred to her that if her breathing didn’t calm, she would hyperventilate, and that would be the end of her enjoyment of this confrontation with her former professor. But from her mouth issued the first words that occurred to her, the words that were dying to spill from her lips.

‘Spank me!’

And without blinking an eye, he moved around her to resume his place on the sofa, and she tracked him with her eyes, allowing herself to note the snug fit of the trousers over his tight bum and the way the fabric clung to the long muscles of his thighs as he seated himself. His posture was open, welcoming, even, and he looked directly into her eyes as he spoke.

‘You know the rules, Hermione.’

And feeling like she had leapt recklessly into the sizzling frying pan, Hermione reached beneath her skirt and hooked her fingers in the waistband of her tights.
Chapter 72

For the Potions Master’s Amusement

Chapter 72: Catharsis

She peeled out of her tights and knickers in one go, her hands trembling with excitement, and he watched her carefully, his full attention upon her. She allowed the under garments to lie on the floor beside her discarded ballerina flats, and took one step toward him, but he stayed her with a word.

‘No,’ he said. ‘I think we can dispense with the skirt, don’t you?’

Hermione hesitated only a moment before undoing the button and zip and letting the skirt pool on the rug. She took another step towards him, a quiver with anticipation, refusing to think about what would happen afterwards. It didn’t matter—what mattered was the flat of his hand firmly and repeatedly smacking her arse cheeks—and she was going to have it.

‘Come along,’ he said, and she bent to lay herself across his accommodating thighs. He straightened her with a practised hand at her waist, pulling her closer to his torso, and the warmth of one of his hands was on her flesh, smoothing lightly down from the small of her back to the top of her thigh, before settling on her bum.

‘What do you want, Hermione?’ he asked, his voice silkily smooth.

‘A s-spanking,’ she said, thinking to herself, Oh, don’t talk about it! She didn’t want to talk about it—she didn’t want to think about it!—what she wanted was to experience it. To encourage him, she gave an experimental wriggle, but the warmth on her bum quickly became an iron-like grip upon her hip.

‘None of that,’ he reproved, and at his word, she relaxed beneath his hand. ‘Good girl,’ he praised, and her quim throbbed.

Fuck, she thought, suddenly frightened. Couldn’t she, just this once, take what she wanted from an encounter and be the mistress of her own reactions? Why did he coax such unprincipled responses from her? She wanted the smacking of her arse, and if it made her hot and wet, she’d finger herself in her room—but sweet Circe, she needed this!

‘Why do you want a spanking, Hermione?’ he inquired, as if it were a perfectly reasonable thing to have a conversation with someone face-to-bum, rather than face-to-face.

She gritted her teeth. He had said he would do this—why was he interrogating her?

‘Because I need it,’ she bit out. ‘Just do it!’

‘Ask nicely,’ he admonished.

‘Please,’ she supplied grudgingly. A wave of uncertainty assailed her—what was she thinking of?—and she made an attempt to wriggle to her feet. ‘Oh, forget it, if you don’t want to—’

The iron grip at her waist kept her in place, and his other hand—His spanking hand, she thought wildly—smacked her left cheek, a stinging slap. The next blow fell before she could process the first, and the pain-pleasure circuit was complete.
He spanked her as he had always done, no two consecutive blows landing in the same spot, his hand neglecting not one inch of her bottom, and Hermione surrendered herself to the glory of it, every smack driving her further along the once familiar path she longed to travel again.

Then his voice was at her ear, his torso angled over her, his hand slowing but not ceasing in its delivery of her spanking.

‘You need this, don’t you?’ he purred. ‘You need this discipline at my hand.’

She didn’t answer, unable to formulate coherent words, and he didn’t insist upon a response, for her soft, panting breaths of need and pleasure told their own tale.

‘Girls who need to be put over the knee to receive their discipline are special little sluts,’ he told her, his voice caressing, his hand punishing. ‘I know just what you need, little one—never fear.’

And the speed of the spanking increased, his hand coming down faster, harder, on flesh which had already endured a sustained spanking. Her cheeks tingled and hurt, more than she had remembered, warming her bottom in a circle of fiery yearning. And though she had not meant to, she began to cry, her skin burning as he rained slaps on her arse cheeks. Each impact of his hand seemed to expel a new particle of anger, of pride, of resentment, of resistance, and she gave herself over to the cleansing tears, welcoming them, knowing she had never felt purer of spirit than after a spanking at the hands of Severus Snape.

She cried for her hurt feelings, for the loss of her faith in him, for her disillusionment over the Dominant/submissive life—and when those things had fallen away with her tears, she cried in contrition for the pain she had inflicted on the man she had loved with all her body, mind, heart, and soul.

Miraculously, Hermione had come full circle.

She was unaware of being moved until she smelled his skin, close and warm, and a fine lawn handkerchief was drying her face of the evidence of her prolonged cry. He was here, she was in his lap, and she buried her face in his neck, her arms clinging to him.

‘I’m sorry!’ she sobbed, and he rocked her gently, one hand soothing up and down her back, his lips at her temple as he seemed to breathe in the fragrance of her hair.

‘Shh,’ he murmured, stroking her hair. ‘You’ve nothing to apologise for.’

‘You s-said you loved me,’ she cried, torn with anguish at the thought of the hurt she had inflicted. ‘You’d never said it to anyone, and you said it to me—and I was too angry and resentful to l-listen!’

‘Shh,’ he repeated, rocking, petting, holding her. ‘Never mind.’

‘It was a horrible thing to d-do!’ she choked out. ‘Oh God, Severus, I’m so sorry!’

She tilted her tear-streaked face up to his, beseeching, and he looked down at her, an agony of indecision on his face, his eyes filled with ineffable tenderness.

‘Please,’ she whispered, unsure what she asked for, and with a ragged exhalation that sounded like a moan, he covered her mouth with his.

His lips were soft upon hers, chaste and giving, and she opened to him like a flower to the sun.
It was like drinking from a well after a long walk through the desert, or the first gasp of fresh air after being too long underwater—it was life and breath, and she could not think how she had gone so long without it—without him.

‘Hermione,’ he breathed against her lips, unbelieving, and she threaded her fingers through his hair and invaded the warmth of his mouth with her tongue, drawing a strangled groan from him.

He was tentative as he gently tangled his tongue with hers, and assayed but two forays into her mouth before he ended the kiss, resting his cheek against the top of her head. She pressed against his chest and heard his heart’s thunder, as if he had run a great distance. They held on to one another tightly, as if afraid the other would slip insubstantially away.

‘Don’t you want to kiss me?’ she asked his shirt front, feeling as if she were coming alive again after a long sleep.

‘What I do not wish to do is take advantage of your fragile state,’ he said, his voice now rumbling beneath her ear.

Take advantage? How could he possibly do so? She wanted him, wanted to lose herself in him—every cell of her was longing for his touch, his voice, his presence in her body and in her mind.

She tilted her face to look to him, touching the pads of her fingertips to his lips. His eyes closed, an expression of pain on his face, and his lips parted slightly, as if his instinct were to take her fingers into the warm wetness of his mouth. Her tummy turned over, flooding her with heat and want.

‘Please,’ she begged, not caring how desperate she sounded. She drew one of his hands to her inner thigh. ‘I need …’

His eyes opened again, and the heat there seemed a proper match for the fire in her belly. The hand she had drawn onto her leg flexed lightly against her skin.

‘What do you need?’ he asked, his voice rough, almost as if he spoke against his will. ‘Tell me, Hermione.’

‘Touch me,’ she whispered, ashamed but heedless of her shame. Her need overwhelmed every other consideration, and she shifted upon his lap, the extreme, wanton craving dictating to her. ‘Kiss me,’ she added, still whispering, and she lifted her chin slightly, drawing her lips closer to his. ‘Do me.’

For the space of a breath, she was afraid he would deny her, but then he spoke.

‘Very well,’ he said, and even as his mouth claimed hers, his long, knowing fingers parted her labia, and for the first time in more than half a year, someone other than herself touched her most intimate place.

Now he kissed her fully, his tongue dominating her mouth, stroking, as his fingers worked their magic. He did not seem to notice the soft, dark hair which had grown to cover her pudendum since last he had touched her. He slipped a finger up her channel, gathering and spreading her wetness, drawing a gasping moan from her throat. A murmur came from him, as if in answer to her small sound, and the pads of two fingers stroked up from her swollen inner labia to her nerve centre. Hermione clung to him helplessly, feeling the consuming passion flaming through her. Dear God, she needed to succumb, but she resisted.

‘No,’ she whimpered, arching her neck and breaking their kiss.

‘Don’t hold back, little slut,’ he murmured, nuzzling her ear and allowing his teeth to close on the
'It’s going to be over too quickly,’ she said, her hips moving in spite of her resistance—her need for it to last. ‘I want it to go on longer … want more …’

He raised his head and looked down into her face, his eyes like pools in which she could submerge her very self. He examined her intently, two fingers slowly penetrating her, leaving her clitoris untouched as he studied her face, then he glanced down her body, cradled against him, to the point where he could look his fill at her cunt, spread open, slick and needy, like a prize for the taking.

At last, his gaze travelled again to her face, his mesmerising eyes half-lidded, an expression of open, unbridled sensuality contorting his lips. ‘You may have all the orgasms you want, greedy girl,’ he promised gruffly, insinuating a third finger in her vagina and grinding the palm of his hand against her clitoris.

And she pulled his face back to hers with her fingers in his hair, her lips parted to receive his thrusting tongue. He knew exactly how to thrill her, mimicking the action of his fingers in her quim with his tongue in her mouth, fingers caressing clitoris as his tongue caressed hers, and in mere seconds she was coming, a bone-rattling climax that left her thighs clamped mercilessly on his wrist.

She trembled against him until he Summoned his suit coat from a corner chair and covered her with it from the waist down, looking after her solicitously, as he had always done during their times in his study, so long ago. He supported her with one arm, widening the vee of his thighs to distribute her weight more comfortably, and the hand with which he had fingered her cupped her mons.

Gradually, she came back to herself, her mind calmer after her cry and the lessening of the tension between them brought by her orgasm—but she wasn’t finished, no, not nearly. She leaned in to press her lips to the flesh showing at the open collar of his shirt, moving her bottom against the wool of his trousers, where his erection had only partially subsided.

His attention had not wandered from her, and the hand on her quim slipped to her hip, to hold her still. ‘Are you ready to come again for me, greedy girl?’ he asked her, a caressing tone in his voice.

She reached for his shirt and began to unbutton it. ‘Are we going to do it here? Will Rafe mind?’

A slight frown touched his brow, and the hand beneath the coat came up to capture her wrist.

‘Rafe has no objection regarding the number of times I finger fuck you in his study,’ he informed her.

Hermione smiled and squirmed a bit again. ‘I don’t want your finger now,’ she said, the heat beginning to glow again, low in her tummy.

‘I understood that you wanted more,’ he pointed out, his posture stiffening, becoming less accommodating for her.

Hermione straightened, pulling her hand free to put her arms about his neck, and she whispered in his ear. ‘I want you inside of me,’ she told him, feeling shameless and excited, a peculiar combination of emotions she would always associate with him. Oh, she would have him between her thighs, his body labouring above hers, stroking her in ways no efforts of her own could ever reproduce …

He shifted her off of his lap, settling her courteously enough on the sofa cushion, and put distance between them. Hermione felt a flutter of panic, so familiar from her early days with him, when she never wanted to leave him, and he drew such stringent boundaries for her.
‘Tell me plainly what you’re asking for,’ he said seriously, his expression guarded.

Hermione looked away from him, picking at the lapel of the black wool suit coat at her waist. Why was he acting like this? Didn’t he want to have sex with her? That’s not the impression she’d got from the bulge of his erection when he was spanking her—and certainly not what she had understood from the iron hardness of it while he fingered her to orgasm. Taking a deep breath, she looked up at him.

‘I want to have sex with you,’ she said baldly. ‘I want you to fuck me.’ Her body reacted to her confession with an aching throb in her belly.

He stood abruptly and looked down at her, a full frown now marring his expression. ‘I spanked you,’ he said. ‘You wanted to come, so I fingered you. You said you wanted more, and I agreed to provide more orgasms.’

Hermione’s face flamed in embarrassment, and she was a bit surprised at how out of practice she had become. Not only had her bottom grown unused to the stinging pain of a thorough spanking, but her sense of decorum had reasserted itself to the point that she was flustered to have him speak of such things out loud, as if this were a proper conversation to have in one’s sitting room.

‘Hermione,’ he said, and she looked again into his face. Satisfied that he had her attention, he said gravely, ‘Taking your pleasure from me is a gift I may choose to give you. Taking your pleasure with me, however, is an entirely … separate matter.’

Hermione felt a thump of dread in the region of her heart, a sick disappointment, the type which, when dealt by him, had often spurred her to unwise behaviour. ‘It’s not as if we’ve never done it before,’ she said sullenly, looking down, away from his searching black eyes.

‘That is not the point,’ he said firmly. ‘What does our having sex mean, Hermione? What does it say about the state of our relationship?’

Her mind skittered away from his question, the banked fire in her quim uncaring about the details of these negotiations. ‘We don’t have to decide that right now, do we?’ she reasoned, raising her eyes again to his face.

His lips tightened. ‘Why should I take you to my bed?’ he said flatly.

She pushed his coat onto the sofa cushion and stood, naked below the plain white blouse she wore. As she had hoped, his eyes flicked to her nether parts for a moment before settling on her face.

‘Because we’re good together,’ she said, want billowing from her like ship’s sails in a fierce cross-wind. ‘Because I want you.’

His eyes flashed at that, and his chin rose. ‘What would you expect of this encounter?’ he said, his tone emotionless.

Hermione stomped a bare foot. ‘Why does it have to be so complicated?’ she complained.

His arms crossed over his chest and a sneer touched his lips. ‘Because I am a sexual Dominant,’ he said, sounding cold. ‘You should not require an explanation on this subject.’

Understanding of his reticence flooded her suddenly. ‘I know what you are!’ she cried. She stepped forward and rested her hands upon the forearms crossed over his chest. ‘I consent! You can do anything with me you’ve done before.’
He glared into her eyes. ‘I can bind your wrists and flog you?’ he demanded. ‘I can gag you and clamp your nipples and cover your cunt in candle wax? I can force you to your knees and fuck your throat and make you swallow my come?’

He spat out his examples like challenges that she was too cowardly to accept, giving her no opportunity to answer him, and the very disdain of his voice made her ache for him, long to earn his approval. Yes, she wanted to be immobilised and forced to pleasure him, because she knew he would repay her in kind, carrying her beyond herself to that place of mindless bliss to which only he held the key.

‘Oh yes, please,’ she said, emphasising her plea with fingers tightened on his arm.

He stared down into her face for so long that she was afraid he would send her away unsatisfied—for so long that she thought he would use Legilimency—but he didn’t. She implored him with her eyes, thirsting for that transcendence only he could bring, refusing to think beyond the consummation she so devoutly desired. At long last, he allowed his arms to drop, dislodging her hold on him.

‘Get dressed and come with me,’ he said, picking up his coat and putting it on.

Hermione retrieved her skirt with shaking hands, pulling it up and managing the zip but unable to force the button through its hole. Giving up, she allowed her blouse to fall over the waistband and stuffed her feet into her shoes. Before she could pick up her under garments, he plucked them from the rug and stuffed them into his pocket. He strode to the door and waited for her to join him there.

Hermione followed, her legs feeling shaky with anticipation, butterflies darting wildly about in her chest even as she ached for him in her very core. She was a seething mass of excitement, which only trebled when he pushed her unexpectedly against the wall, his hand spanning her throat. He bent down, his large, hooked nose on level with hers, wickedness glinting in his eyes. His thumb and index finger found the pulse points in her throat and he applied slight pressure, an emotion she could not identify twisting his mouth.

‘Are you sure about this?’ he growled, tightening his hold at her throat infinitesimally, until her heart pounded in her ears and she saw a flash of light on the periphery of her vision. Did he think to frighten her off with this display? Didn’t he know it only excited her more, made her want him more desperately than before?

‘I’m sure,’ she whispered, barely able to make herself heard, her ability to speak somehow restricted by the pressure at her throat.

When he kissed her again, it was savagely, almost as if he would punish her—devour her—before ever she would have his cock in her cunt again. Then he released her, first her lips, and then her throat, and wrapping his hand around her wrist in an almost brutal grip, he pulled her from the room.
Chapter 73: Concatenation

For the Potions Master’s Amusement

He led her through the darkened house, a firm grip upon her wrist, and Hermione followed him eagerly, hoping no one would accost them and find her in such a state of dishabille. When they reached the doorway into the kitchen, he turned down a small hallway she had not seen before and escorted her to door at the side of the house. He opened it, and they stepped out into the night.

‘Where are we going?’ Hermione asked, stopping in her tracks.

He did not turn to her or slow down, and she was forced to stumble along behind him down a gravel pathway to what appeared to be an old stable-type structure. She could see a light in the window of the upper level, and he led her up an exterior staircase. At the top, he threw open a door and released her wrist.

‘Enter, if you will,’ he said flatly.

She did so without hesitation, and he followed her in, closing and warding the door behind him. She was in a large apartment that occupied the entire upper storey.

‘What is this?’ she asked, looking about at the squishy armchairs with cheerful cushions—definitely t’s tastes.

‘It’s my place at Odd Cottage,’ he answered shortly. ‘Go into the bedroom.’

She turned to look at him and found that he was watching her intently. He removed his coat and tossed it onto a chair, then began to unfasten his belt. He held her eyes unflinchingly as he pulled the leather free from his belt loops.

‘Last chance to go back to the house, Hermione,’ he said, his voice perfectly inflectionless.

She looked at the length of leather in his hand and shook her head slowly. ‘I have no desire to go away from you,’ she said honestly.

His head moved back slightly, as if she had struck him. ‘Then you’re a bit overdressed for the occasion, aren’t you?’ he replied.

She reached for the buttons on her blouse.

‘I believe I instructed you to go to the bedroom,’ he said, an edge to his voice.

‘All right,’ she said, slightly bemused. Why did it matter where she undressed, as long as they both got naked? She turned to go, but he caught her before she could take two steps, one hand buried in her hair, halting her progress, then slowly compelling her to her knees.

He bent over her, his black eyes glittering in the light of the oil lamp. ‘It appears what you require instruction in how to address me,’ he said.

Hermione’s heart was in her throat, pounding erratically. She was enthralled by the physical dominance, terribly aroused by his grim, demanding manner. Had she indeed forgotten what it meant to accept an invitation to the serpent’s lair?
'I apologise, sir,' she said, lowering her eyes from his, excited by the observance of this protocol.

'Before tonight, who last spanked your bottom?' he demanded suddenly, his voice gruff with some violent emotion.

Hermione felt herself covered of a sudden in gooseflesh. Was that jealousy? 'You last spanked me, sir,' she informed her knees.

The hand in her hair tightened. 'And who, before tonight, last kissed you?' he continued.

Hermione felt herself flush with pleasure—he was jealous of her still—what did it mean? 'You last kissed me, sir,' she said.

He released her, standing straight again. 'Then remember where you are—and with whom,' he said, and strode past her into the next room.

Hermione scrambled to her feet and hurried after him. So, he was going to make her toe the submissive’s line if she wanted him to fuck her? Well, fine. She could do that. But it would undoubtedly mean there would be some uncomfortable moments ahead of her. Sure, she could turn around and go back to the house, but nothing about that would satisfy her. She would not be satisfied until this man had his way with her.

When she crossed the threshold, he had lit the candles, and she saw a four-poster bed of ebony wood, the posts elaborately carved with coiling serpents. The bed covering was Slytherin green, as was the rug upon the floor, and the chest and wardrobe were of ebony wood, as well. One leather wingchair sat beside the fireplace, and a door behind the armchair undoubtedly led into the bathroom.

'I believe I told you to undress.'

Startled, she looked over at him, her lips parting to reply.

'You do not have leave to speak, Hermione.'

She bit her lip, subsiding. He was treating her as if she’d never been with him before—as if she were a raw recruit entering the Potions master’s study for the first time.

Had someone else entered his study since last she’d been there? The notion stung. Had he shared this bed with some other woman recently? She felt a sick thump of jealousy and her lips pressed together. Perhaps she was just his weekend amusement before he returned to whomever he was currently training.

She eyed him, beginning to unbutton her blouse. Would he answer her questions? Would he even permit her to ask them?

Stop thinking about it! she told herself fiercely. It doesn’t matter! Just get him in the bed ... get him naked ... get him inside of you!

He stood across the room from her, waiting as she fumbled with her buttons.

'Get it done, or I shall do it for you—and your clothing will not be much use to you in tatters, will it? You’d have to go back to the house naked, for any passing person to see you and know what you’d been up to.'

He smiled rather unpleasantly. She knew he was perfectly capable of carrying out his threat, so she
pulled the blouse off over her head and removed her bra. Then she let her skirt drop to the floor and stood before him, naked.

‘That’s better,’ he said. ‘Now, stand still.’

He approached her slowly, and Hermione fought the urge to cover herself with her hands. It was strange how one lost the habit of putting oneself on display. Nevertheless, his attention was fully engaged, and she remembered well how it felt to have this man’s full, undivided attention focussed on her. The memory drew a sigh from her, and she closed her eyes for a moment, breathing deeply. It would all be worth it …

‘Eyes open,’ he said, and he was right before her, within touching distance.

She obeyed, noting how his eyes rested on her breasts, and he walked in a slow circle around her, surveying her entire naked body. When he stopped, she could feel his presence at her shoulder, and when he spoke, his breath stirred the hair covering her ear.

‘You still have the most perfect breasts I have ever seen, Hermione,’ he said. ‘I have often thought of your breasts, you know.’

Her skin was instantly all gooseflesh, the nipples of her breasts crinkling into hard, pebbled disks.

‘Where shall I place the lashes with the belt you’ll receive for your earlier disrespect?’ he said in a musing voice, and Hermione couldn’t help herself.

‘But I’ve already had a spanking!’ she objected.

Almost instantly, he was before her, and in his hand, he held what looked like her red ball-gag. ‘You are out of practice, aren’t you?’ he said. ‘Open your mouth to receive your gag, little slut.’

‘I—’ she began, but he spoke again, his voice like a whip.

‘This is not an option, girl. Open your mouth now.’

Feeling somewhat cowed, Hermione obeyed him, and the soft rubber was between her teeth, the harness fastened behind her head.

‘There,’ he said, stepping back and looking her over. ‘That’s better, isn’t it? No danger now of inadvertently speaking out of turn.’

He seemed pleased, and truthfully, she knew she was too overwrought to remember the rules, right now. It was her nature to question everything, and she was far too out of practice to hope to remember to be quiet if he wanted her silence. Perhaps it was better to be gagged, for now.

‘But the question remains,’ he continued, ‘of where to place the lashes for misbehaviour.’ He stepped back and looked her over.

Hermione found herself holding her breath, waiting to see what he would decide. Her bottom was still tender from the spanking she’d received, but the belt was a fairly harsh implement—if he used it on some other part of her body, it would almost certainly leave a bit of a stripe … But wouldn’t it be nice to have some memento of their reunion when she went home the next day?

‘Oh, here’s an area that can withstand a lash or two,’ he said, and he stepped into her personal space, his hand cupping her mons. ‘You have this nice protective covering, don’t you?’ he added, his fingertips ruffling through the hair covering her pudendum. ‘Arms up,’ he instructed.
Hermione complied, feeling the encircling of her wrists and wondering if he set up such spells everywhere he went … well, a Dominant never knew when he’d need to whip a girl, did he?

*Stop it! she scolded herself. His life when you’re not with him is none of your business!*

He watched her face, as if he knew her thoughts, and then his fingers pressed through her labia to the slickness within.

‘What kind of nasty slut gets wet when threatened with having her cunt whipped, hmm?’ he asked, rolling her clitoris lightly beneath the balls of his fingertips. ‘That’s the question you should ask yourself, greedy girl.’

Hermione felt her hips thrust forward against his fingers, and she was mortified at her lack of control. Oh, she knew she was deviant in her desires—wouldn’t her fantasies horrify anyone else she knew? Anyone outside of the D/s world, at least. But dear Circe, why did he make her think about it? Why couldn’t he just do it—do her—and to hell with the rest of it?

‘You are a filthy girl, aren’t you?’ he asked softly, continuing to finger her. ‘You like to be bound and gagged and whipped, don’t you?’

She just stared at him helplessly, knowing her shameless attempts to pleasure herself on his fingers told a far clearer story about her and her desires than anything to which she would voluntarily admit.

‘That’s right, little one,’ he murmured, and before her eyes, he placed his fingers in his mouth and sucked her juices from them. His eyes closed for a moment, then opened, inexplicably darkened and, if possible, even more intense. ‘I haven’t forgotten the taste of your cunt,’ he hissed, then turned and walked three paces from her. ‘You remember the belt, don’t you? Place your feet shoulder width apart—good girl—and don’t move. Stand there and take your punishment like the true submissive you are.’

Hermione wanted to close her eyes, thinking she could withstand the lashes better if she weren’t watching, but she could not tear her gaze away from him. Just exactly this way, he had haunted her dreams for months—the Dominant in the black boots and trousers, with an unadorned white shirt, and his black hair falling to his shoulders, moving about his face with every stroke of his implement, whether belt, strap, crop, or her divine flogger. Just as he was, he represented the god of her idolatry, and she could no more look away from him than she could deny herself the promise of his cock—than she could forego her next breath.

He moved slightly to one side and delivered her punishment with a sure, deft touch—three strikes with the belt leather, one right after the other, landing flush across the top of her pudendum, the last stroke wrapping about her hip and drawing a cry from her, though it made little noise past the ball gag.

He kept his distance after the last blow, watching her, and she wondered if he were trying to decide what to do next. He allowed the belt to drop to the rug, and he advanced on her, moving behind her. He murmured, and there was a full length mirror before her.

‘You are so beautiful when you wear my marks, Hermione,’ he said, his fingertips lightly touching the red stripe at her hipbone, where his belt had struck her. ‘I have missed disciplining you.’

She stared into the mirror, meeting his gaze there, as they looked at their reflections. His palms cupped the bottoms of her breasts, and he lightly passed his thumbs over her nipples. Hermione felt the touch like heat in her quim, and she leaned back against him. He slipped his palms up, squeezing the globes of her breasts, and he ground his erection against her naked arse, a guttural grunt coming
from his throat.

‘I’m afraid you won’t get much sleep tonight,’ he said, and though his mouth bore the languid droop she associated with his intense arousal, his eyes still glittered almost manically. ‘You may regret your decision to take your pleasure with me, little one, because I have had precious little pleasure since last I fucked your cunt—and I will take what you have offered me and use it fully, I promise you.’

In response, Hermione pressed back against him, moving her bum in circles against the rod of his erection, and he grimaced his approval, pinching and twisting her nipples as he bucked against her arse, making no effort to restrain his reactions.

She gasped behind the gag at the pain of his handling of her nipples, and he moderated his grasp. ‘It will take time to build you up to accepting my full attentions to your breasts again,’ he murmured, lowering his face to her hair. He thrust again against her backside, sliding a hand down her ribcage, over her navel, and slipping his fingers down her slit, rubbing her clitoris.

‘Filthy, dirty girl,’ he growled. ‘You want me to fuck your hole, don’t you?’

He raised his head to meet her eyes in the mirror, and she nodded, thrusting against his fingers as he thrust against her backside, unbearably aroused, feeling the slickness of her quim now on the tops of her thighs, as if her cunt were overflowing with desire for his thick, hard cock.

‘I’ll remove the gag,’ he said, rhythmically squeezing one breast and rubbing her clitoris, making it difficult for her to follow his words, ‘but you must agree to be a good girl—will you be good?’

She murmured her assent, and he stopped caressing her to unhook harness. He tossed the ball-gag onto the floor behind him, near the belt, and Summoned a fresh handkerchief to dry her face.

‘Hermione, you’re not allowed to come in this room tonight unless my cock is in your body—it can be in your mouth or in your cunt—’ He dipped his face to nuzzle her neck, then put his lips at the shell of her ear. ‘It could even be in your arse, if you begged me for it.’

Hermione bit her lip and shook her head from side to side, not wanting to speak and anger him, but also not wanting him to try to fuck her ass. She hadn’t kept up with the anal training—she hadn’t taken any of her D/s toys with her when she left Roissy House—there was no way she could comfortably endure that tonight!

‘But you’re not to come without permission, and you’re not to come unless I’m fucking you—do you understand and agree with these requirements?’

‘Yes, sir,’ she said, and he moved in front of her.

‘Have you anything else to say?’ he asked her.

Hermione wished her hands were free, so that she could touch him. Her tongue darted out to moisten her lips, and she saw him react as if she had deliberately provoked him. ‘Please fuck me,’ she said.

His hands slid up her arms and released her wrists, and even as she reached for him, he pushed her to her knees.

‘Then take my cock out, greedy girl,’ he said. ‘If you’re very good, I’ll let you taste it.’

Hermione’s fingers did not fumble as she managed his flies; the smell she associated with his arousal met her as she reached to free him from his clothing. His cock—dear Merlin, how she had missed it!—was turgid, the tip darkened and partially exposed. With a moan, she grasped him just below the
head and pulled down, completely exposing the glistening head of his penis. Her lips parted, her
tongue extended, and he stopped her with a word.

‘Slut,’ he purred, and she looked up into his face, her tongue still out. ‘What do you want?’

‘I want to lick you,’ she answered.

His lips parted in a terrible sneer. ‘Beg me,’ he instructed, and she complied without a hesitation.

‘Please, sir,’ she said. ‘Please—may I lick and suck your big, hard cock?’

His eyes darkened, his nostrils flaring, and unexpectedly, a chair appeared directly behind him. He
sank into the armchair, dragging her between his knees, and she scrambled to position herself. ‘Show
me what you remember, little slut,’ he said, and he slumped back, his eyes never wavering from her
face.

Hermione never hesitated, but leaned forward and delicately licked the moisture seeping from the slit
on his cock. He hissed his approval, and she closed her eyes, kneeling up to engulf the knob in the
warmth of her mouth. He tasted right—*just* right—and she felt absolutely right to be on her knees,
sucking him. There were things that had been wrong—she had no interest in thinking of those things
in this moment—but *this* had always been right. She was where she belonged and wanted to be
when she was in his bedroom, naked and in his complete power. She had no need to worry or
question when he dominated her sexually—he was ideal, and she was in perfect accord with him.

Working gently, she swirled her tongue over the surface of the knob, savouring him. In tiny
increments, she slid down the thick length of him, applying light suction as she moved down. She
couldn’t begin to take all of him—they’d not had time to practice that sort of thing in their short time
together—but she took as much as she could before sliding back up, her tongue caressing the fleshy
underside of his cock as she moved.

Releasing him from her mouth, she licked her way down his length, one hand rising to fondle his
testicles, and unmindful of the wiry black hair, she took one into her mouth, gently rolling it on her
tongue before moving to repeat the process with the other, listening with the ear of a devotee to his
guttural sounds and doing all she could to increase them.

She lifted her face, her hand encompassing his girth and stroking him as she looked at him. He
reached for her, wrapping his hand in her hair, and pulled her face back down, pushing himself into
her mouth and stroking between her lips repeatedly, stopping at the crest of each thrust just short of
gagging her. Hermione revelled in the act, loving the hand in her hair, the engorged organ fucking
her mouth, the sight and sound and smell of him. She lost herself in it all, finding her centre here, on
the floor at his feet, the instrument of his pleasure.

When he disengaged from her mouth and grabbed her shoulders, dragging her into the chair with
him, she opened her eyes like a girl who’s just been startled from sleep in the middle of a pleasant
dream. He took a handful of hair and kissed her mouth, pushing his tongue in where lately his cock
had been, his erection slick against her stomach as she lay sprawled upon him. The pressure of his
mouth was bruising as he spread a burning trail of kisses down to her throat, where he fastened his
lips, marking her with what would be a purple love bite. Hermione murmured her acceptance,
tangling fingers in his fall of oily, black hair.

‘Before tonight, who was the last to fuck your mouth?’ he demanded, his teeth scraping against her
carotid artery.

‘You,’ she breathed, arching her neck to him, completely surrendering.
‘On my bed on your back, little slut,’ he growled in her ear. ‘Spread your legs for me and show me where you want me.’

Hermione slid easily to her feet, crossing to the bed with its dark green covering. She situated herself as he had instructed and watched him eagerly as he undressed. The sinews of his body entranced her as he bent, reached, and twisted to remove his attire. At last, fully naked, he strode to the bed, wasting no time before covering her body with his own. He stared down into her face, his eyes glittering in the candlelight, his teeth clenched.

‘Who fucked you last, Hermione?’ he asked, and his voice was perfectly controlled, a contrast to the turgid insistence of the cock lying heavily on her thigh.

‘You fucked me last,’ she said, raising her legs so that her inner thighs caressed his hips. ‘Please do it again.’

And before she could draw breath, he was joined with her, the length and breadth of him encased in the slick sheath of her body. She felt herself pierced, stretched, and she uttered a small cry of completion, simply to have him in her again. Then he began to move sinuously against her, each movement creating a frisson of perfection, and she was vocalising at every movement, her whimpers and moans a symphony of welcome and reunion.

As she had known he would, he stared into her eyes and slipped into her mind, effortlessly riffling through her memories, looking for evidence that she had lied in her answers to his questions of whom she had been with since leaving him—but there was nothing for him to find. She had never, in all these months, looked at another man with interest. How could she, when he possessed her very soul? When she ached for him with every breath she drew and feared seeing him again in equal measure? For she had known, in her heart of hearts, if she saw him again, it would be just like this—two entities meant to be in orbit, each of the other, coming together on a collision course.

Dear God, but she loved him.

And she reached out for him with all her love, her completion, her transcendence, and when she touched his mind with her own, she felt his joy as the twist of his hips brought him into contact with her sweet spot.

Still … she heard him say, satisfaction like that of a battle victor surging in him.

Yes, she replied, and then she was only sensation, experiencing him and giving all she had and all she was to the integration of their bodies, minds, and spirits.

He laboured over her, feelings of conquest, dominion, and reverence rolling through her even as he experienced them. With each new stroke, Hermione rising to meet him in body and mind, the seamless spiral carried them higher, further, and beyond. She wasn’t sure how the friction of his cock in her quim created the perfect union of souls, but as the first orgasm bloomed simultaneously in her body and her mind, she was fully in subspace, where she could dissolve in complete confidence that he would somehow hold her together and bring her safely home again.

The spasms of her muscles triggered him to wild, pounding action, his shout beginning low in his chest, and rising like the cry of an ancient warrior at the fall of his foe. His hips rotated in one final, deliberate grind against hers, and she was screaming with him, her nerve endings plunging her unexpectedly into a second climax, swept along helplessly in the power of his blinding orgasm.

They lay together bonelessly, limbs embracing, slick with sweat and the juices of their joining, their minds likewise entwined, replete with their synthesis, and thus they slept on the same pillow, life’s
breath commingling with each exhalation.
Chapter 74

For the Potions Master’s Amusement

Chapter 74: Salience

She had slept for only a short time when she woke to find him suckling her breast. He sucked firmly, pulling the full areola into his mouth, his teeth lightly biting, his tongue flicking lazily against her nipple. She murmured and placed a hand on his head, and he tugged her closer, lifting his head to give the same treatment to the neglected breast. She stroked his increasingly oily hair, reflecting that it had been many hours since they had first laid eyes on one another at the christening; no doubt her hair was the worse for wear, as well.

Not surprisingly, the licking and sucking slowly aroused her ardour again, and soon, she was angling her body towards him, seeking contact for her aching quim. He seemed to know exactly what she needed, shifting again and moving over her, insinuating a knee against her labia, and she rubbed herself against it, almost purring in pleasure. She had no idea how much time passed as Severus Snape silently paid thorough court to her breasts, but she was almost breathless with want when he rolled away from her, onto his feet.

‘Bring your hot little cunt to the bath,’ he said, and she did not hesitate to take his hand and follow him into the bathroom.

He lit but one candle in the room. ‘Turn on the tap,’ he instructed, nodding toward the old-fashioned claw-footed tub. ‘Then put your hands on the edge of the tub and spread your legs.’

Her centre throbbed in response to his command, and she bent willingly over the steaming bathwater, feeling the floor beneath her elevate as if she stood upon a low box before he placed his hands at her hips and pushed his cock into her cunt from behind.

He fucked her slowly, for it was an awkward position, but she was hot for him, unbearably aroused by the caresses he had given her in the bed. She very much wanted to come again, and she pushed back as he thrust into her, wanting to feel the swing of his heavy scrotum slapping against her swollen labia.

‘Filthy girl,’ he said caressingly. ‘Get into the water, and perhaps some of the filth will come off as you wash me.’
But washing was not the first order of business, for he reclined against the sloping back of the huge old bathtub and pulled her down onto his cock. She rode him eagerly, leaning forward to brace her arms on either side of his head, giving him clear opportunity to nuzzle and nip at her breasts, even as he gave the occasional teasing rub to her clitoris.

‘What do you want, little slut?’ he asked her, resting his head back, his eyes slumberous with desire as he watched her.

‘I want to come,’ she told him, hearing the plea in her voice and not caring, for she knew he would like it.

‘Beg,’ he said, crossing his arms behind his head as if he wanted nothing more than to watch her take her pleasure on his cock.

‘Please,’ she said promptly, straightening up and sliding her hands up her torso to cup her breasts. His lip curled in a snarl of lascivious approval, and she repeated the gesture for him. ‘Please make me come again,’ she said breathlessly. ‘I’ll be good for you, I promise.’

He smiled unpleasantly. ‘You’ll be good whether I give you another orgasm or not, Hermione,’ he said. ‘I’ll make sure of it—never doubt.’

But instead of abasing her, this promise excited her more, and her lips parted as she lowered herself again on his erection, twisting her hips.

‘Yes, M—’ She stopped herself just in time, before uttering that title she no longer had the right to speak, but if he noticed, he gave no sign.

‘Very well, nasty little slut,’ he said, reaching out to rub her clitoris. ‘If you can bring yourself off riding my cock, let me see you do it.’

Hermione gasped as he fingered her, and she came in a matter of seconds, her cries echoing around the tiles of the small room.

‘I’d forgotten what a noisy girl you can be,’ he said, watching her with satisfied eyes. ‘Now, we’ll wash—and then you’ll show me how long you can endure me eating your cunt without coming, won’t you?’
As it turned out, she didn’t endure it very well, at all.

She was still quivering from her unsanctioned orgasm when he snapped, ‘Arms above your head!’

Hermione swallowed and reached toward the headboard, unsurprised to feel the wrist restraints, but when he took her ankles and straightened her legs, pushing them up and back, she was a bit alarmed.

‘What are you—’she began.

‘Silence!’ he snapped. ‘You knew there would be consequences for disobedience.’

So she closed her lips tightly together as he manually applied leather cuffs to her ankles and secured them with bindings she could not see, her wrists and ankles nearly parallel.

‘It’s too bad you’ve already been spanked,’ he said meditatively, kneeling at her arse and stroking her bum cheeks. ‘This is a perfect position for a bit of bottom and fanny flogging.’ Now he looked into her worried face, between her suspended legs, and he stroked his erection, firming it. ‘But we won’t let your position go to waste.’

Hermione fought her alarm. She was short of breath from having her ankles about her ears—how could one hope to catch a decent breath with her lungs all scrunched up?—but she knew part of her panic was psychological in nature, rather than physical, and she schooled herself to breathe slowly.

Then he placed himself at her entrance and pushed inside with a groan of carnal gratification. Taking hold of her upper thighs, he proceeded to fuck her hard, his eyes glittering in the candlelight as he watched her face and her bouncing breasts, occasionally looking down to watch his cock pumping in and out of her slick hole. Hermione did not derive a great deal of pleasure from the act, situated as she was, and he made no effort to stimulate her—but she was not dismayed. It was punishment for coming without permission, and it was what one accepted if one chose to submit to the sexual domination of Severus Snape.

Thankfully, it did not take him long to climax, and he pulled his cock out and ejaculated on her lower abdomen, smugly watching the pulsing fluid splat on her belly. Then he sat back on his heels to catch his breath.
Hermione bit her lip to keep from asking to be untied, and it seemed to her that he took longer than he needed, as if he wanted to force her to ask. But at last, he seemed satisfied, and he stood to release the bindings from her ankles, slowly lowering her legs to the bed and lightly massaging the muscles before he released her wrists.

She closed her eyes, feeling suddenly very sleepy, and he seemed to agree, for he nudged her. ‘Budge up,’ he said, sliding in behind her and pulling the covers over them. ‘We’ll sleep for a bit before I decide how I want to fuck you again.’

And as he spooned against her back, Hermione slept.

In her dream, she floated in deliciously warm water, weightless and content. The water rippled and flowed around her, and a particularly delightful current pulsed between her thighs, tickling her clitoris like the tongue of a lover. She squirmed and luxuriated, and as she became more stimulated, she tried to press against it, with surprising success.

Her eyes fluttered open and she saw that she was in the middle of a bed covered in dark green, sprawled nearly on her stomach, with someone licking her clitoris from behind. She breathed deeply and wriggled against the delightful tongue, only to have it abandon her.

She sighed her protest, then he was at her back again, rolling her into position, her back to his chest, before sliding his cock home into her cunt. Hermione murmured, and the professor kissed her shoulder, licked, then bit, sucking hard, bruising her skin even as his fingers tickled and rubbed her nub, the pain/pleasure combination slipping her neatly into subspace. Time slowed as he rocked against her back, moving in and out of her languorously, fingers slick with the juices of her cunt sliding up her torso to pinch and pull at her nipples. She rocked with him, transported, wishing their congress could go on and on—if only all of life could be her in Severus Snape’s bed, his hardness penetrating her softness, their mutual pleasure completing the circuit of murmurs and sighs, tenderness and pleasure they now shared.

‘You’re such a little fuck slut, aren’t you, Hermione?’ he murmured into her hair, the tip of his tongue then lightly flicking inside her ear.

‘Yes, I am,’ she agreed, pressing her bum back, taking him further inside of her and groaning with her own effort.

‘You need this from me,’ he informed her, his tweaking, rubbing hand now stroking the soft expanse of skin along the roundness of her hip, dipping down to follow the contour of her waist. ‘Say it.’
She squeezed her internal muscles, earning a guttural groan from him as her vagina massaged his penis. ‘I need you to fuck me and spank me and finger me and lick me and suck me—’

His teeth closed firmly on her earlobe as he stroked fingers into her slit, down to where their bodies joined and back up her swollen inner lips to rub firm, knowing circles on her clitoris. He shifted up and forward, gaining more momentum, moving with more purpose. ‘Oh fuck, you Siren, I’m going to come,’ he grated, jerking his hips against her forcefully, and he ground his entire palm against her wet, swollen cunt. ‘Come for me now, Hermione!’

And with a shudder, she obeyed his command, the waves of pleasure spreading to encompass him, as well, for he gripped her hip and thrust twice, hard, his fingers bruising, and cried out. She felt him subside onto the pillow at her side, and she rolled to face him, moving in to kiss his mouth. He dragged her tightly against him with one long leg hooked over her thighs, and they lay thus together, kissing and caressing one another, until they dozed again.

Hermione awoke after dawn and slipped out of bed, padding into the bathroom and relieving herself. She stepped to the sink to wash her hands and saw her reflection, her hair impossible, her face pale, three purple love bites visible above her collarbone. Her bum was sore from the severe spanking it had received, her vaginal tissues were tender from the unaccustomed fucking, and her shoulders and hips were sore from the bondage.

Inside, she felt washed clean, serene, and content. She felt as if she could easily face and conquer any person or situation. Giving her reflection a cocky grin, she turned and went into the bedroom, finding and putting on her bra, her blouse, and her skirt. Her under things, which Severus had plucked from the floor of Rafe’s study, were nowhere to be seen, so she went into the sitting room, where he had dropped his coat upon a chair. There, in his pockets, she found both her knickers and her tights. The knickers she left crumpled on the chair cushion, but she wriggled into the tights, glad of the bit of covering, for the autumn morning was chilly.

That done, her eyes were drawn to the shelf of books against the wall by the door, and she went to investigate its contents. She was intrigued to find the shelves stocked with Muggle paperbacks, from Agatha Christie to Jane Austen to Ian Fleming to Charles Dickens. She smiled softly, running a fingertip along the spines of the books, then noticed a writing desk tucked into a corner. Frowning, she crossed the floor to the desk and picked up the book lying on top.

‘Good morning,’ Severus said from the doorway, and Hermione turned, a frown between her brows.

‘Why do you have my books on your desk?’ she asked, picking up the second so that she held a book in each hand. ‘I packed these in case I needed something to read, but I couldn’t find them last night, so I went down to Rafe’s study.’
The Potions master lounged against the doorjamb, hair rumpled from the bed, wearing nothing but a black dressing gown, his long, narrow feet bare upon the cold floor. He crossed his arms over his chest and quirked an eyebrow at her. ‘How do you imagine your books came to be in my room?’ he asked her.

Hermione sucked in an indignant breath, feeling the stuporous post-coital fog blowing away, revealing what lay beneath. ‘I can’t begin to imagine it, Severus,’ she snapped. ‘Why don’t you tell me?’

He smirked, advancing into the room. He stopped in front of her and took one of the books from her hand. ‘Information Technology Management,’ he read. He looked into her face. ‘Rather dull stuff for pleasure reading,’ he drawled.

She snatched the book angrily from his hand. ‘How did you get it?’ she demanded.

He reached to smooth a stray strand of hair from her forehead, but she pulled away from him. He frowned. ‘I told Caffey, the house-elf, that you had brought my books back after borrowing them and asked her to fetch them from your bag.’

‘You tricked me!’ she cried, outraged.

The ghost of a smile touched his lips. ‘It was rather clever of me, wasn’t it?’ he said.

He was laughing at her! ‘You haven’t learned a thing!’ she said. ‘You think you can manipulate me any way you wish, and I’ll just accept it!’

The first hint of wariness touched his eyes. ‘Hermione,’ he said, his tone persuasive, ‘you were behaving like a skittish filly—I simply helped you along. We needed to have our talk, and it turned out well, did it not?’ He took the books from her hands, returning them to the desk, then cupping her shoulders in his large, warm hands. ‘You had no objections last night.’

Hermione began to jerk away, but his hands tightened, preventing her.

‘This isn’t about last night!’ she cried. ‘This is about you being dishonest with me!’
He pulled her against him, wrapping up her struggling form and pressing his cheek to the top of her head. ‘I simply wished to see you alone,’ he said. ‘I had no wish to trick you or manipulate you.’

A sick feeling of disappointment bloomed in Hermione’s mid-section, and she felt almost nauseated with regret. She stood quietly until he loosened his hold and looked down into her face.

‘Would you care to return to Hogwarts with me—to spend Sunday in my rooms?’

Hermione stepped back, out of his reach, slowly shaking her head. ‘No,’ she said. ‘No, Severus—how can I trust you when you think you can do whatever you like to get what you want?’

His cheeks flushed a dull red. ‘Don’t you think you’re blowing things out of proportion?’ he snapped. ‘You’re behaving as if you were violated in some way!’

Hermione closed her eyes and shakily drew breath. The night had been exciting, the domination breathtaking, the sex mind-blowing—but his heedless machinations soured it for her. Suddenly, she was desolate and exhausted; all she wanted was her own tiny flat, a cup of tea, and a book to make her forget it all … although her experience had taught her that forgetting was much harder than it ought to be.

‘If you don’t understand, I can’t explain it to you,’ she said quietly.

He stared down at her, his confusion evident in his puckered brow. ‘You still love me!’ he blurted, as if the words were torn from him against his will. ‘I’ve been in your mind—I know you do!’

Hermione sighed. ‘Of course I love you,’ she said sadly, ‘just as you love me—but that doesn’t matter, don’t you see?’

He stared at her, his lips pressed together in a thin, uncompromising line. ‘This is a mistake,’ he said, his voice ragged.

Hermione picked up her books and turned from him, walking out the door without another word.

Hermione dressed quickly after her shower, plaing her hair and tying her trainers before picking up her bag and going downstairs. She found t and Rafe at breakfast, with a rather haggard looking
Professor Snape. Hermione’s heart twisted in her chest as she looked at him, seeing the waxen skin and haunted eyes.

‘What’s this?’ t said, pausing in the act of refilling Rafe’s teacup. ‘You aren’t leaving so soon, surely?’

Severus’ face turned and his eyes locked with hers. She felt as if all the breath had been knocked from her.

‘I need to get back,’ Hermione lied, trying and failing to look away from him.

Taffy stood and embraced Hermione. ‘But not before you eat,’ she coaxed, trying to lead Hermione to the table.

‘You needn’t go,’ Severus said quietly. ‘I’ll leave.’

Rafe stood abruptly. ‘Sev, I’d like a word in the study, if you please.’

The two wizards left the dining room, and Hermione subsided weakly into a chair.

‘What happened?’ t whispered, but Hermione simply shook her head.

Taffy watched Hermione, seemingly exasperated. It was clear that she wanted to scold, but as she opened her mouth to being, the sound of raised voices reached them from the study.

‘They didn’t get the door closed,’ Hermione said dully, and t hushed her.

‘… without a play contract?’ Rafe shouted. ‘What the hell were you thinking, Sev?’

Taffy reached for Hermione’s hand.
‘… didn’t think it was necessary,’ the professor was saying, his voice tight. ‘She asked me to spank her—asked me to—’

‘I don’t care if she asked you to bind her and clamp her and wax her and flog her!’ Rafe snapped impatiently. ‘You’re making the mistakes I would expect of a Dom in his first year of D/s, not his twentieth!’

Taffy squeezed the hand she held, and Hermione stared down at the tablecloth, tears which had not bothered her in the apartment above the stable now stinging her eyes.

‘… and bugger off!’ the professor shouted.

‘Not when it happens in my house!’ Rafe shouted back. ‘Under my roof—under my protection—Christ, Sev, I don’t know what’s wrong with you.’

Hot tears fell onto the clasped hands of the two submissives.

‘I’ve never heard them row like this,’ t whispered, sounding almost frightened as the voices in the next room droned on, the words indistinguishable.

‘… and what the fuck did you do to my sofa?’ Rafe demanded angrily. ‘Now it’s not even long enough for me to stretch out and have a kip!’

Hermione swallowed past the painful lump in her throat and managed a pathetic smile. ‘I wondered why he kept getting closer to me,’ she whispered. ‘He must have been making the sofa shorter.’

Resolutely, she stood and put the bag over her shoulder. ‘I’m sorry, t,’ she said. ‘I’ll stay longer, next time, I promise.’ She bent to kiss her friend’s cheek. ‘Kiss Daisy for me, won’t you?’

Taffy stood and wrapped an arm about Hermione’s waist, and the two girls went down the hallway towards the front door, passing silently by the study, although Hermione glanced in to see Severus Transfiguring Rafe’s sofa back to its proper length.

‘You’ll come back soon?’ t asked at the door.
Before Hermione could answer, a strained voice spoke her name.

‘Hermione.’

She turned, the grey, misty morning light silhouetting her from the open doorway, and looked at Severus Snape, who stood outside of the study, his face drawn.

‘Yes?’ she said.

‘I won’t seek you out again,’ he said, his chin lifting just a fraction, his pride straightening his spine.

‘That’s probably for the best,’ Hermione replied, and turning from him, she stepped into the mist and Disapparated.
Hermione was surprised the next Saturday morning after Daisy’s christening to find Rafe and on her doorstep, the baby in t’s arms and the baby’s bag slung over Rafe’s shoulder. Hermione couldn’t help but smile; the big, burly Dominant looked every inch a modern-day daddy. With cheerful assurance, t blew past her excuses of the flat being a mess, and Rafe followed in his wife’s wake, surrendering the baby’s bag and engulfing Hermione in a gentle, brotherly hug.

‘I hope you can forgive me,’ he said. ‘I would never have condoned …’ His voice trailed off, and Hermione returned his hug warmly. She knew he was torn between loyalty to his friend and his Dominant’s sense of responsibility.

‘I know you wouldn’t,’ she said. ‘I don’t think he would, either—not really.’

Rafe held her from him, his hands on her shoulders, and looked down into her face. ‘I meant what I said before,’ he reminded her. ‘You may call on me at any time, as you would a brother. And if you want to talk about your choices as a submissive, you could ask for no better source than t.’ He turned his warm gaze to his wife, who sat on Hermione’s tatty little loveseat with her baby at her breast. ‘Severus is my best mate, but he’s not the only Dominant in Britain, Hermione.’ He gave her shoulders a squeeze. ‘Well, I’m off to meet with Hadrian—you girls be good.’

When the door closed behind Rafe, Hermione turned to face t, wondering if she was about to receive the telling-off she had probably earned, but t smiled and patted the sofa cushion beside her. ‘Tell me everything,’ she invited, and Hermione did, curling up on the cushion and pouring out her heart.

At the end of Hermione’s account of what had happened between her and the professor the week before, t settled baby Daisy in her travel cot and moved into Hermione’s tiny kitchen to put the kettle on.

‘Well, it’s clear that he wants you so much his desire clouds over his judgment,’ she said, beginning to look through the cupboard for the tea. ‘The question you have to consider, my darling, is what you want for yourself. When you know the answer to that, then we’ll know how to proceed.’

Hermione followed her friend and took up the teapot, rinsing it under the spigot. ‘I don’t know what I want,’ she confessed. ‘I love him, but he has no respect for me.’

Taffy folded her arms and watched as Hermione dried the pot and measured the tea into it. ‘Do you really think that? That he has no respect for you?’

Hermione considered for a moment. ‘No,’ she said finally. ‘I know he respects me, but he doesn’t always behave as if he does, and that’s what I can’t bear.’

The kettle boiled, and t poured the water into the teapot before she spoke again. ‘Do you think he’s incapable of learning to behave properly?’

Hermione sighed, taking the teacups down from the cupboard. ‘He’s dead stubborn,’ she said. ‘And when I’m with him, I want to lay down my will—I want to give him everything—but how can I, t, when I never know when he’ll do something “for my own good” that I never would have consented to?’

Chapter 75: Trust

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Chapter 75
Sitting at the small round table, t smiled lovingly at Hermione. ‘But dearest, that’s what safe words and contracts are for,’ she said simply.

Hermione bit her lip and poured tea, turning aside to fetch milk from the fridge. ‘We’ve never had either,’ she said quietly.

‘I know you haven’t, and that’s a big part of the problem.’

Hermione put the milk on the table with a packet of chocolate digestive biscuits, just like the ones t had brought along on their trip down to Roissy House from Hogsmeade, that day so long ago. Taffy said, ‘I think, in the beginning, he meant only to train you up for another Master—then you offered your submission, and he accepted, thinking he would attend to the details later—only later never came, because he had to leave you. And then, when we got to see our Masters at Roissy House, the visits were so brief …’

Taffy took her cup and sipped, while Hermione broke a biscuit in half, watching it crumble on the plate. She had been in turmoil since leaving Odd Cottage the weekend before. Being with him had been as intoxicating as ever—his touch upon her flesh and in her mind was perfect in every way—but the realisation of his machinations to lure her to the study brought to mind every objection she’d ever had about his overbearing, manipulative side.

‘How can I ever trust him again?’ she said sadly.

Taffy grasped her wrist. ‘Look at me,’ she said in a voice suddenly stern, and Hermione raised her eyes. ‘Hermione, how can he ever trust you again?’

Hermione’s mouth dropped open, her protest rising to her lips before her mind had processed her objections, but t forestalled her with a shake of her head.

‘No,’ she said firmly. ‘Listen to me. Do you know how long it took Severus to accept me as part of Rafe’s life?’

Hermione closed her mouth. She had never considered it—Rafe, t, and Severus seemed perfectly at ease with one another—but perhaps it had been difficult for the professor to see his best mate co-opted by someone whose claims outweighed his in every way.

‘Exactly,’ t said. ‘It was bloody difficult. I’ve never known a person so distrustful, so unwilling to give a person the benefit of the doubt.’

Hermione nodded, her brow furrowing. She had often observed the same thing, had wished the professor were not so intractable, so quick to misinterpret words and gestures as being mocking or disrespectful of him.

Taffy released her and sat back again. ‘I was hurt by it at first, but then Rafe explained it to me. You see, Severus never had many friends at school, except for Rafe and one other person—a girl. Severus trusted her, and she betrayed and humiliated him in front of the whole school.’

Hermione’s heart twisted in her chest. ‘How? What happened?’

But t shook her head. ‘Rafe never gave me the details, and I’ve never asked. It really doesn’t matter, does it? Even if it was nothing, Severus perceived it as a betrayal, and Rafe says it changed him.’

Hermione picked up her teacup and drank, suddenly needing the soothing warmth.

‘Rafe says Severus trusted you, and when you withdrew your submission, it really shook him. But
this last time—letting him in again and then pushing him out …’

Hermione set her cup into its saucer with a rattle. ‘But he’s so strong!’ she said defensively. ‘He’s so sure!’

The look of pity t gave her made her want to scream.

‘Hermione, he’s just a man,’ t said gently. ‘Not a god, not a machine—he’s flesh and blood, just like you are—imperfect, just like you.’

Hermione sagged back in her chair, the truth striking her like the impact of a bullet to the heart. For all her idolisation of him, for all his godlike supremacy when she knelt at his feet, Severus Snape was still just a man. A man, with bad habits and blind spots and bloody-minded prejudices, just like every other man who walked the earth.

‘Then how can we ever submit to them?’ she said desolately, her eyes beseeching t for an answer.

Her friend’s response was swift and tender, for t took Hermione’s hand between both of hers. ‘Because we need to,’ she said firmly. ‘We need to submit, and they need to dominate. We set out our expectations of one another, and we agree to them, and we work on the relationship. We’re made to fit together perfectly, and somehow we do, for all our individual imperfections.’

Daisy stirred and began to whimper, but t kept her eyes on Hermione’s face.

‘What you need to be thinking about now is what you want,’ she said, repeating her sentiment from earlier. ‘And when you decide, you need to let him know.’

Hermione gasped. ‘But I told him!’

Taffy scoffed. ‘That it would be best if he didn’t seek you out? Remember who you’re talking to, silly! I know very well that you’re mad for him and that you don’t want anyone else to touch you. I felt the same way about Rafe, you know, and I had to pursue him before he would believe me.’

Daisy began to cry, and t stood to attend to her daughter. Hermione stared at the chocolate crumbs on her table, her heart and mind in utter chaos.

The days that followed seemed to pass in a dream. She went to work, and as long as she was occupied, she functioned perfectly. But left to her own thoughts, she went around and around in the same loop, over and over again.

She loved him. She wanted him. She knew he wanted her. But when she was with him, the temptation to utterly succumb was too strong, and although she trusted him implicitly with her physical safety, he had proved himself to be …

This is the point where she always hit a wall. What had he proved himself to be? Concerned for her safety? Or determined to have everything his own way? Was it possible he had been both concerned and manipulative? If so, where did it cross the line of what she found to be unacceptable? She didn’t know—couldn’t think—couldn’t decide.

She would consider things carefully—she didn’t have to decide something so important in a hurry, after all—and while she considered, she would try to live her life like any other single nineteen-year-old witch living on her own in London.

And time passed.
She made it all the way to Christmas without asking a single question of her Roissy House friends about the Dark Potions master, but when Valentine’s Day came, she was racked with pain at her memories of the previous year. That night, she went on the obligatory blind date arranged for her by Ginny Weasley, and she observed the efforts Harry and Ron made for their girlfriends—the candy, the flowers—but nothing she saw came close to the breathtaking, proprietary behaviour Severus Snape had exhibited towards his collared submissive on that holiday. The attention the professor had paid her, even from a distance, had been intoxicating, and she had been too insensible of how fortunate she was.

The next month, when the anniversary of their break-up arrived, she missed three days of work, broke every piece of crockery in her kitchen in a fit of despair, then ate enough chocolate ice cream to gain five pounds. Finally, she mended those of her dishes which were not smashed beyond repair and arranged to meet Kell for lunch.

Kell was troubled. ‘Shouldn’t you be asking him, Hermione?’

Hermione shrugged. ‘I can’t seem to make myself do it.’

Kell glanced over her shoulder, her fingertips touching her throat, as if feeling for the collar which she dared not to wear into Muggle London. ‘I don’t know if Master would want me telling you, because I’m under strict orders not to interfere between you and Master Severus,’ she said a bit nervously, ‘but I’m going to do it, because you’ve always done everything you could to help me, and Master, too.’ She’d sat forward then, speaking in an undertone. ‘He was at Roissy House over Christmas break, and he looked like hell—pasty and thin. He came to the big Christmas play party, but he kept more or less to himself.’

Hermione felt a small ray of satisfaction. ‘He didn’t have a submissive with him? You didn’t see him play with anyone?’

Kell shook her head. ‘There’s a rumour that Hadrian made him promise to wait a year before even thinking about starting something with another girl.’

The satisfaction evaporated. ‘A year from when?’ she asked. ‘From when I left Roissy House? Or from our last time together?’

Kell’s blue eyes widened. ‘Then it’s true!’ she said excitedly. ‘You were with him at Odd Cottage last autumn!’

Hermione nodded morosely.

‘But you couldn’t talk it out?’ Kell asked sympathetically.

Hermione averted her eyes. ‘No …’

Kell took her hand. ‘Oh honey,’ she said. ‘That happened with Master and me, more than once.’

Hermione looked up again. ‘What did?’

‘We would get together, intending to talk things out, but I would push him to play, and we’d end up in bed before we got anything done.’ She shook her head ruefully. ‘That was when he finally said he had no control over me and sent me away for the second time. I went to Elinore—I really thought I wouldn’t survive the heartbreak—but she and Hadrian were wonderful. And then I started training with Master Claudius.’ Her eyes brightened. ‘Hermione, if you asked, I’m sure …’

‘No!’ Hermione said, suppressing a shudder of distaste. ‘No, I won’t go into training with another
Kell nodded. ‘Well, it’s not for everyone,’ she agreed. ‘Master has told me since then that he learned from Hadrian that it’s much harder when the Dominant is in love with his submissive. It’s difficult for the Dom to separate his emotions from discipline issues, but if he’s unable to effectively dominate his sub, then he’s failing her, no matter how much he loves her.’ She flushed, her rosy cheeks making her look particularly pretty. ‘We’re so happy now,’ she said.

Hermione squeezed her hand. ‘And I’m happy for you,’ she said warmly, meaning it. ‘I think you and Reg are perfect for each other. I just wish I could sort out my feelings …’

‘Why don’t you go talk to him?’ Kell asked.

Hermione bit her lip. ‘I don’t know how he’ll react. What if he wouldn’t even talk to me? I can’t make up my mind.’

Kell’s lips thinned. ‘Well, if he’s going to be like that, it’s better for you to find out now, so you can get on with your life, isn’t it? It’s been over a year now—time to move on, one way or another.’

At the very thought, Hermione’s heart hurt. ‘I can’t bear to think of moving on,’ she said quietly.

Kell leaned forward impulsively. ‘That sounds like you have made up your mind, sis,’ she said. Then she sobered. ‘And you might want to do something about it sooner, rather than later.’

Hermione felt a stab of unease. ‘Why?’

‘Well, it’s been a year now since you left Roissy House, hasn’t it? Vi told me last week that Master Severus is going to spend Easter break in London, and he’s supposed to begin doing some session training—not undertaking full responsibility for the training of a particular submissive, but working with them on a session-by-session basis, at the request of their training Masters.’

Hermione’s lips pressed together angrily as she thought about so-called ‘session training’. It was probably Dominant shorthand for fucking without taking responsibility for a sub.

*Stop it!* she scolded herself. *You know they aren’t like that at Roissy House—they take training seriously. And just look at Kell! Proper training helped her to get the Dominant she loved, didn’t it?*

She pushed her plate away, her stomach suddenly too upset to tolerate food. She had tried not to think about the professor—had tried to date ‘normal’ men—but she craved the private, secret things she had experienced at the feet of Severus Snape. The ‘nice’ young men with whom her friends paired her—the attempts she had made at intimacy—none of it had been what she needed. They didn’t smell right, those boys her own age, they didn’t touch her properly, and she certainly wasn’t aroused by the things which seemed to make her dates behave like rutting animals. It was like trying to get on with Anthony Goldstein—she was constitutionally incapable of it.

Kell’s voice recalled her attention.

‘Talk to him,’ she said. ‘If you don’t let him know how you feel, he may move on—and then it would be … complicated.’

Hermione nodded. ‘You’re right—I know you’re right,’ she murmured, but still, she wondered what she would do.

Hermione walked past the U.S. Embassy again, her eyes darting round Grosvenor Square. She was
dressed unremarkably for Muggle London, wearing blue jeans and a hooded jacket, so she wasn’t worried about calling attention to herself, but it was growing late; dusk was falling, and she was either going to have to fish or cut bait.

She stared at the space between the two elegant townhouses where Secret-Kept Roissy House nestled. He was in there—she was fairly certain, because he wasn’t at Odd Cottage—she had already checked. No one was at Odd Cottage for Easter; Caffey the house-elf had reported that her Master and Mistress had gone to visit Daisy’s Muggle grandparents for the holiday.

Hermione rubbed the palms of her hands down the fabric of her jeans, drying them. The family would be sitting down to dinner, right about now—did she really want to burst in on them at table? On the other hand, this was the professor’s first opportunity to visit Roissy House since the one year anniversary of their break-up—for all she knew, he might be meeting submissives in need of ‘session training’ at this very moment.

Did she really want to deal with those thoughts? Truly, the time for thinking was past; it was time now for action.

Thinking to herself, ‘The location of Roissy House is number eleven, Grosvenor Square,’ she all but ran up to the imposing edifice and pressed the bell. Almost at once, the door opened, and Hermione was looking down at Pitty, the house-elf.

‘Miss!’ Pitty cried, clearly taken aback. ‘We is not expecting you!’

‘Hullo, Pitty,’ Hermione said, licking suddenly dry lips. ‘Is Master Severus here?’

Pitty stepped aside, allowing Hermione to enter the hallway. ‘Master and Mistress is in the sitting room,’ she said.

‘I know my way,’ Hermione said firmly, and set off down the wide marble hallway, memory singing in her as she went. That was where they said goodbye when he and Rafe left and she and t held each other and cried; this was the spot he stood and caught her flying leap before the assembled guests of the Gala Night; this was where he informed the door keeper that she belonged to him before escorting her for the first time into the Dungeon.

Buoyed by the feelings these memories stirred—how in love they had been! How immersed in one another!—she confidently opened the sitting room doors and entered the room.

A fire burned in the hearth, warming the chill of the April evening and casting a golden glow over those gathered around it. Hermione first noted that there were no men in the room—the Dominants must have already withdrawn to their Study—but she was dimly aware of the silver-haired Elinore, sitting and conversing with the two young women on the sofa, and these strangers struck her to stone. She froze, staring at them. Both were girls who had been ahead of her at Hogwarts; she knew neither of them well, but she recognised the plump blond as a former Hufflepuff, and her brunette companion had been in Ravenclaw. They were both dressed for dinner, their apparel tasteful but sexy, their hair and make-up party perfect—and they each wore red patent leather training collars on their throats.

Was he going to do them both? Together? A la Jacqueline and Diana? She felt simultaneously hot with anger and cold with dread.

‘Good evening, Hermione,’ Elinore said crisply.

Hermione turned to her, flushing guiltily. She’s been staring and hadn’t spoken to anyone—but why
did Elinore sound so cold? Before she could speak, Elinore spoke again.

‘Tell me—to what do we owe the surprise _pleasure_ of your visit?’
Chapter 76

For the Potions Master’s Amusement

Chapter 76: Perseverance

Hermione was a bit taken aback by Elinore’s manner. ‘Good evening, Elinore,’ she said, stepping forward and offering her hand. ‘I’m sorry for coming by with no notice, but I was hoping to catch Professor Snape at home.’

Elinore’s dark eyes narrowed slightly at this, and although she took Hermione’s hand briefly, she released it almost immediately. ‘Ladies,’ she said to the two submissives on the sofa, ‘this is Hermione Granger. She used to live here at Roissy House with us.’

Hermione turned to greet the young women and was fully aware of how speculatively they surveyed her, sitting there in their party dresses, undoubtedly bare-arsed beneath their skirts, looking askance at her blue jeans and trainers. Oh shite, why did it seem that she never dressed properly for her visits to Professor Snape?

‘This is Chassity,’ Elinore said, nodding to the blond, then indicating the brunette, ‘and Ava.’

The submissives murmured greetings, although they did not offer their hands, and it seemed to Hermione as if they studied her very closely. She forced herself not to smooth her unruly hair, knowing it would be a fruitless task, and briefly regretting her lack of make-up, she turned back determinedly to Elinore.

‘I don’t want to interrupt your evening,’ she said, trying to sound off-hand, rather than desperate. ‘Would it be all right for me to go up to see Professor Snape?’

Elinore’s expression became, if possible, frostier than before. ‘Is he expecting you?’ she asked pointedly.

Hermione was tempted to lie. Why was Elinore trying to keep her from Severus? Was it possible she knew what had happened at Odd Cottage? Was Elinore angry because Hermione had not knuckled under, like a good subbie?

More like because you took what you wanted and left him again, her inner critic informed her viciously. It’s no more than what you deserve!

But she was acutely conscious of those older, prettier girls watching her, and she could just imagine how they exulted inside to see her turned away—weren’t they there, after all, in the hopes of catching the attention of the sexiest single Dominant in all of the wizarding London D/s scene? Determination to foil their hopes caused her back to straighten, and she opened her mouth to lie.

‘Hermione!’

The words died on her lips, and she turned to the doorway as Hadrian strode across the room, his hands outstretched, his blue eyes warm with welcome.

‘Hadrian—hello,’ she said, advancing to meet him.

He took her hands and bent to kiss her cheek, then straightened to looksearchingly into her eyes. ‘You’re here for Severus?’ he asked quietly.
‘He’s not expecting her,’ Elinore said stridently.

Hadrian silenced his wife with one look, although disapproval continued to radiate from her.

Hermione nodded once in answer to Hadrian’s question.

‘Are you seriously ready to talk to him?’ Hadrian asked, his voice pitched for her ears alone.

Hermione nodded again. ‘Will he … will he see me?’ she asked.

Hadrian’s expression didn’t change. ‘I don’t know,’ he said. ‘But go up to him. The only way to find out is to ask.’

Hermione squeezed Hadrian’s hands. ‘Thank you,’ she mouthed.

‘Good luck,’ Hadrian responded, and Hermione hurried from the room.

Hermione stared at the closed door of the room in which she had spent three months of the happiest as well as the most frightening times of her life. He was in there—she could all but feel his presence, pulling her resisting self to him as surely as if he were a magnet and she were a sentient metal filing—and all she had to do was knock on the door to find out if he would deign to speak with her.

Stepping forward, past her fear and uncertainty, she rapped on the wood panel. Would he call out for her to enter, or would he open the …

The door opened, and he filled the doorway, tall and intimidating in his school robes. He had not changed from his teaching raiment, and indeed, she knew it had been scarcely four hours since classes had been dismissed for the Easter hols. He appeared thinner, but otherwise, much as he had done in October. His black hair hung in oily curtains to his shoulders, and there was a shadow of beard on his jaw line, but for all his unkempt appearance, the sight of him made her heart sing. She felt the irrepressible smile of greeting as it curved on her lips, and she read his responses in his black eyes—first shock, then disbelief, and finally, a firming of resolve—for his chin came up, and his lips thinned.

‘What do you want?’

The words snapped out like a whiplash, but Hermione responded by widening her stance, as if to weather a blow. ‘I’ve come to speak with you,’ she answered, wishing her voice sounded a bit stronger.

The hands fisted at his sides rose and were hidden as he crossed his arms over his chest. ‘About what?’

Hermione took a deep breath and released it slowly, doing what she could to diffuse the feelings of panic rising in her. You knew he would be resistant, she reminded herself firmly. He doesn’t trust you—and why should he?

‘About you and me,’ she answered and braced herself for the likely derision to come.

The flare of his substantial nostrils was the only reaction she could detect in him. ‘I was not aware that there was a “you and me” to be discussed,’ he said flatly, maintaining his physical blockade of the doorway.

Hermione glanced nervously toward the stairwell, imagining the two submissives from the sitting
room standing just out of sight, hearing this conversation and being highly amused at her expense. Her tongue darted out to moisten her lips, and his eyes sharpened, his brows drawing together.

‘Please, sir,’ she said, ‘couldn’t we talk somewhere other than the middle of the hallway?’

There was a moment when her fate hung in the balance, when he might have put a full stop to her hopes by sending her away, but that moment passed as he stepped to one side. Hermione didn’t hesitate to barge into the bedroom, getting a heady whiff of his aftershave as she brushed past him. She stopped and turned to him as he closed the door.

‘Sit,’ he said, gesturing at the furniture before the hearth.

Hermione chose the loveseat, wondering if he would sit beside her, as he had done at Odd Cottage, but he simply moved to stand before the fire. So, he would tower over her as she spoke—but who was she to object to him taking what advantage he could in this situation? She had burst in on him unexpectedly, had she not?

‘Thank you,’ she said simply.

His arms crossed again. ‘Say what you want to say,’ he replied tersely.

Hermione sat straighter, praying to find the right words. This was her chance. How could she have walked into the serpent’s lair without a rehearsed speech? But she had existed on little save nerve and want for the last month, working up the courage to do this; she had been unable to concentrate well enough or long enough to prepare what she wanted to say.

‘I’m ready to talk about what happened with us,’ she said.

His expression did not change. ‘What makes you think I am interested in such a conversation?’

Hermione was taken aback. This was not the way the conversation was meant to progress. Surely he wouldn’t have let her in if he wasn’t willing to talk to her! Surely his mentor would not have sent her upstairs …

‘But Hadrian let me come up!’ she blurted.

‘Hadrian does not speak for me,’ he replied.

Hermione shifted position on the chair. This wasn’t going well. ‘At Odd Cottage, you wanted to talk about it, and I wouldn’t cooperate,’ she pointed out.

He shrugged. ‘That was then, and this is now.’

She was on her feet before she knew what she was about. ‘I want you!’

He shook his head. ‘You want what I give you,’ he told her. ‘Do not confuse that with something more … personal.’

Hermione stomped her foot in frustration. ‘Don’t talk to me as if I’m stupid!’ she cried. ‘I know the difference! I don’t want just what you give me—if that were all, I could find another Dominant, couldn’t I? But I don’t want some other Dominant. I want you!’

She ended her outburst standing right before him, her fists wrapped in his robes, but he remained unmoving, his expression unchanged, as if neither her words nor her actions had any impact upon him.
‘Was there anything else?’ he asked evenly.

Hermione felt frustration—desperation—rising in her, a physical sensation much like drowning. She opened her mouth to pull in a great draught of air, refusing to relinquish her hold on him.

‘I’ll take a submissive mentor,’ she babbled. ‘I’ll go to counselling with you. I’ll negotiate a contract. I’ll talk to you about what I think and how I feel, instead of just jumping to conclusions. I won’t expect you to be perfect, I promise you. I know I can do this! Please!’

Still, he remained unmoving, as if he were made of marble, rather than flesh and blood. ‘You are undoubtedly rusty, but you had a solid beginning to your training,’ he said with great detachment, as if it were not he who had spanked and whipped and clamped and fucked her for months. ‘I’m sure that either Hadrian or Claudius would be willing to help place you with a training Dominant.’

Rage flashed through her, and she lashed out at him. ‘Training!’ she spat. ‘Yes, you have training scheduled for tonight, don’t you? I’m sure I interrupted your preparations for your sessions!’

He did not respond to this, but continued to look into her face, seemingly impassive.

Hermione wanted to scream her frustration into his face, but instead, she played her most desperate card.

‘So, if you’re doing sessions for submissives, why can’t you session me? I want a session with you!’

Abruptly, he turned from her, breaking her hold on his robes. He crossed the room to the small mahogany desk, and he took up from it a document that was several pages long. ‘Certainly,’ he said smoothly, thrusting the document into her hands. ‘Complete this play contract and have your training Dominant contact me to schedule a session.’

Hermione, struck speechless with the brutality of this statement, stared at the checklist in her hands.

**A. Orientation**

Your Sexual Orientation is:
- Het
- Bi
- Gay

Your D/s orientation is:
- Dom
- Sub
- Switch

**B. Sexual Activities**

Anal Penetration: Yes / No / Your Rating

Anal Fisting: Yes / No / Your Rating

Anilingus: Yes / No / Your Rating

Cock Worship: Yes / No / Your Rating

Cunnilingus: Yes / No / Your Rating

Cybersex: Yes / No / Your Rating

She stopped reading halfway down the first page and looked up at him. ‘What is cybersex?’

He shrugged. ‘Something Muggles do with their computers, apparently,’ he responded repressively.

‘But you know all of this about me,’ she said, pushing the contract back towards him.
'No,’ he said quietly, and for the first time, she saw a flicker of emotion in his eyes—was it regret? ‘No, I obviously did not know all of this about you.’

She closed her eyes and made a conscious effort to calm down. Her only hope was to win through with reason; raw emotion was not going to get her what she wanted.

‘Severus,’ she said softly, and she opened her eyes again to find his gaze riveted upon her face. ‘I know I’ve hurt you. I expected too much. Then, I thought the worst of you and judged your actions without allowing you to explain yourself. I am sorry, but I know those are just words. The only way I can bring you to trust me again is to show you that I mean what I say. The only way I can prove my love to you—can prove my true submission—is to live it before you, day after day.’ She felt her throat closing, a lump rising there, and she impatiently dashed one lone tear from her cheek. ‘Please don’t send me away.’

There was a knock at the door, and he walked right past her, without a word, to open it.

Pitty the house-elf stood at the door, anxiously twisting her royal blue tea towel in her bony fingers. ‘It’s nine o’clock, Master Severus,’ the little elf squeaked.

The carriage clock on the mantle began to softly chime the hour.

‘That will be all, Pitty,’ the professor said, and the house-elf disappeared.

Hermione walked towards him, the play contract clutched in her hand.

‘I have an appointment elsewhere,’ he informed her, his gaze seeming to fix on a point over her shoulder. ‘Please close the door behind you when you leave.’ And with faultless, almost courtly courtesy, he inclined his head for a moment, his oily hair swinging forward to hide his face, before the door clicked quietly closed behind him.

And Hermione stood for a moment with her head down, staring at the floor, her brow furrowed. In her other life, before she had broken her own heart, she would have accepted this snub as final—as an ending. But she had put herself through fire and come out clarified: she knew now that ‘goodbye’ was but a hurdle to overcome, not a foregone conclusion.

What she needed was a plan. Hadn’t she been forced to show Rafe the things he had been too stubborn to allow her to say? Well, so could Hermione show Severus Snape a thing or two, if he were going to brush off her words like dust from his shoes.

A decision made, she tucked the folded play contract into the back pocket of her jeans and left the room, careful to close the door behind her. But instead of going downstairs, she headed up to the next floor, where the family residences were located. It was time to implement the first step of her new life.
For the Potions Master’s Amusement

Chapter 77: A Pivotal Moment

Vi ran the cold tap over the face flannel and wrung it out before bending over to solicitously smooth the hair back from Hermione’s cheeks and bathe her face. Hermione still crouched on the bathroom floor by the toilet, though her stomach was now empty.

‘Better now?’ Vi asked, and Hermione pushed herself up on the side of the bathtub until she was standing straight.

‘Yes,’ she said, gratefully accepting the face flannel and taking another swipe at her face. She had scarcely made it into the Claudius family’s rooms before bolting for the bathroom. The notion—the very idea—that the man she loved was now with another woman … maybe two women! It made her, quite literally, physically ill.

‘Then let’s go into the sitting room, shall we?’

Vi led the way into the main room, where baby Marcus slept in a beribboned bassinette. She sat in an armchair, and Hermione sat on the pouf before her, as if wanting to keep Vi within touching distance.

‘Why don’t you tell me why you’ve come?’ Vi asked quietly.

Hermione took a shuddering breath. ‘I went to Severus tonight and asked him to … to take me back.’ She stared down at her hands, clenched into fists so tight her knuckles were white. ‘He told me that Hadrian would find me a training Dominant and that—’ she turned anguished eyes to Vi’s face ‘that my new D-Dominant could contact him to schedule a t-training session.’

The tears she had suppressed in the immediate aftermath of the professor’s departure for his ‘previous appointment’ began to fall, and before she knew what she was about, her face was buried upon Vi’s knees, and Vi was stroking her hair as she cried, murmuring soothing words. Dimly, Hermione was aware of Claudius’ voice, and then he had taken the baby into the next room, and Vi and Hermione were alone.

‘How did you know to turn up today, I wonder?’ Vi said, drying Hermione’s face as if she were a child.

‘I knew he would be here for the Easter hols,’ Hermione said dully, her head beginning to pound as it always did after a bout of tears.

‘Because Kelly told you, I suppose,’ Vi said mildly, and Hermione bit her lip. Vi smiled at the guilty look on her face. ‘I won’t tell on her,’ she promised. ‘I know she meant it for the best.’

‘Thanks,’ Hermione muttered miserably. The last thing she wanted to do was to get some other submissive in trouble with her Master. Kell had made it clear that Reg had forbidden her to ‘interfere’.

‘Hermione, I’m very sorry to see you in so much distress.’ Vi took her hand. ‘It touches me that you came to me. Now, tell me how I can help.’
Hermione clung to Vi’s hand as if it were a lifeline. ‘Can you help me learn to be a proper submissive? Will you be my mentor?’

Vi studied her soberly. ‘Are you sure you wouldn’t rather ask t or Kelly?’

Hermione nodded. ‘I’m sure. Kell is still learning—it seems as if she has enough to be getting on with. And t is too close to the situation—her husband is Severus’ best friend. It would be hard for her to be impartial.’

Vi leaned forward a bit, so that their faces were close, and she spoke softly. ‘Why now, Hermione? It’s been over a year since you left us. Why have you changed your mind?’

Hermione swallowed. ‘I would have come to you and asked you to mentor me regardless of what Severus said to me tonight,’ she said. ‘It’s something we neglected the first time around. To be a good submissive, I should have a submissive mentor to guide and teach me.’

Vi cupped Hermione’s face in her palms and pressed their foreheads together. ‘And if Master Severus decides he will not accept your submission again? What then?’

Hermione closed her eyes and moved her head gently from side to side. ‘I don’t know,’ she admitted, her voice suddenly hoarse as her throat constricted in fear. ‘What was Kell’s plan when she began her training, loving Reg as she did?’

Vi sat back again, giving Hermione’s cheek a final, loving pat. ‘Kell had been sent away twice when she came to us. She believed that all was lost with Reggie when she began her formal training—but she knew that she wanted to be a submissive.’

Hermione wrapped her arms around herself, as if to ward off chill, and stared into Vi’s pretty face with bleak eyes. ‘I know now that I want to be a submissive,’ she said. ‘I love Severus Snape, and want to show him that I can be a true submissive, within the boundaries that we agree upon together—but even if he—’ Her voice caught as the threatening tears filled her eyes, spilling over onto her cheeks again. Dear God, it was almost too horrible to speak aloud. She finished in a fractured whisper, ‘Even if he never takes me back, if I ever have another relationship, I want it to be a D/s one.’

Vi produced another handkerchief, her eyes soft with compassion. ‘I will be your mentor,’ she said. ‘What will you do about a training Dominant?’

Hermione shook her head, bringing on more pounding in her temples. ‘I can’t be that way with another man,’ she whispered. ‘I can’t.’

‘Not every interaction between a Dom and a sub is sexual, Hermione—you know that, right?’

Hermione hunched a shoulder, as if to protect her face from a blow. ‘I don’t see how that works,’ she said crossly.

Vi tilted her chin so that their eyes met. ‘Being submissive to another person is often about self-discipline,’ she said earnestly. ‘In time, it will become natural, but in the beginning, we must learn to curb our natural rebellious streaks. Serving a Master is about obedience and self-denial. It doesn’t mean that we aren’t sometimes rewarded, but for a true submissive, the service becomes a source of deep, abiding satisfaction in its own right. Being submissive is about learning to serenely accept the will of another, showing a beautiful, accepting spirit to your Master, so that he knows you revel in his Dominance of you.’

Vi made a fist with one elegantly manicured hand and pressed it gently to Hermione’s mid-section.
‘When you truly understand the submissive nature—when it clicks for you, deep down in your soul—you will feel it here, and it will be with you always, feeding your spirit and enriching you in all of your life, providing you with a core of serenity which no one, save your Master, can touch.’ Her face flushed with a sudden, revealing animation, and her lips parted, as if she could not repress the gasp which rose to in her. ‘And when He does, Hermione …’

Vi sat back, a dreamy, content look on her face. Hermione watched her with yearning in her heart. She had gleaned some degree of this attitude from reading the book written by t and her husband-Master, but never had she heard it articulated so beautifully as Vi had just done. Dear Merlin, but she wanted that peace for herself. If she could present Severus with a Hermione who had learned to be a submissive from the inside out, perhaps he would feel differently about being with her again.

Vi spoke again. ‘Do you see, then, how there are many interactions you can have with a Dominant which are not at all sexual in nature?’

Hermione nodded. ‘Yes, I see what you mean. But how would that Dominant know what progress I was making?’

‘In all of D/s, the most important thing is communication, Hermione. You must communicate with your Master daily, and tell him everything which touches you in any way, so that he can direct you. If he knows every incident you encounter, every irritation, every happiness, then day by day, he can more effectively Dominate your life—and having him know every little thing, he can tailor your experiences in such a way that he fills every crease and crevice in your heart, mind and soul, nurturing, protecting, shaping, and leading you.’

Hermione just stared at Vi, breathless with the picture her friend conjured. Oh, sweet Circe how she wanted to have that existence! And already, she could see how she had blocked Severus from knowing her by her stubborn insistence in holding on to her thoughts and feelings—by not trusting him to cherish her inner life as much as he did her outer body. And she could see his mistakes in this part of their relationship as well, how his issues of trust had effectively blocked the development of the emotional bond between them.

‘So,’ Vi continued, ‘the answer to your question is, the submissive in training keeps an extensive journal, chronicling her journey in great detail. She shares the information mandated by her Dominant and adds anything she thinks or feels on a daily basis which has an effect on her spiritual, emotional, or physical being—in short, anything which might affect the quality of her submission.’

Hermione nodded eagerly. ‘I’ve kept a journal before. I can do that!’

Vi smiled at her. ‘Of course you can. Do you have someone in mind for a trainer? Someone you mean to ask?’

Hermione bit her lip, then said, ‘Would you object if I were to ask Master Claudius?’

Vi studied her for a moment, her expression serious. ‘Master and I had an agreement that we would do no training until after Marcus’ first birthday, but you are very special to us, Hermione. You have lived here as a member of our family, and neither Master nor I are likely to forget how you fought to defend us the night the Death Eaters invaded.’ She gave a decisive nod. ‘I have no objection to you asking for his direction in your training, and that way, I will be involved in your training as well as being your mentor. Will that be acceptable to you?’

Hermione nodded happily. ‘Yes, please,’ she said.

‘Well, I can’t speak for Master,’ Vi cautioned, ‘but you have my blessing to ask him.’
Hermione’s lips curved into what she hoped would pass for a smile. ‘Thank you, Vi,’ she said. ‘You’re saving my life.’

Vi stood and held a hand down to pull Hermione up into her arms. ‘No, you are saving your own life, by asking for help,’ she said into the bushy brown hair. ‘Now, I’m going to put you to bed in the guest room, and in the morning, you may speak with Master.’

The next morning, Hermione shared breakfast with Vi, Claudius, and baby Marcus at the small formal dining table tucked into an alcove off the main sitting room. Hermione watched the interaction between her host and hostess more closely than she had done before. She saw that Vi anticipated her husband’s needs, serving his plate first, preparing his tea just as he liked it, her efforts accepted as his due, but with a deeply felt spoken thanks, accompanied by an intimate smile which caused Hermione’s brows to arch. Was there indeed a sexy, Dominant side to this man who had always seemed to her eyes so cold and somewhat disapproving? Vi certainly seemed to feel there was, and Hermione had just caught her first glimpse into the personal lives of Master Claudius and his wife-submissive. It reminded her of something her mother had once said. ‘The only people who really know what’s going on between a man and woman are the man and woman themselves. It’s impossible for an outsider to ever truly know.’

She dipped her head to take a bite of scrambled eggs, realising that her mum was right about that. For hadn’t it been true, as well, of herself and Severus? Even his closest friends had been astonished to know he had collared her, and none of her friends had known the depth of the bond between them.

After breakfast, Claudius invited Hermione to join him in his study, a room which reminded Hermione strongly of the Dominant’s Study on the ground floor of Roissy House. It was smaller, of course, but had an unmistakable masculine air, tinged with the smell of the furniture polish the house-elves used to keep the wood gleaming. There was no tobacco smell—apparently Claudius was not a smoker, which fit with Hermione’s knowledge of his abstemious character. Gingerly, she sat on the edge of an armchair before his desk, and he sat back, his grey eyes surveying her coolly. His hair was ash blond, silvery at the temples, and he was handsome in an icy, chiselled way, like a piece of marble sculpture. She had at first believed him to be a cold person, but as time had passed, she had begun to see signs of tenderness in his dealings with Kell. In fact, on the Dungeon party night when she had followed Kell and Reg into the dark and touched herself to the sounds of their impassioned lovemaking, she had even felt that he had shown caring for her.

Now, he rested his hands on the arms of his chair and waited for her to speak. Hermione shifted uncomfortably, feeling awkward and embarrassed, but she knew enough about the ways of Dominants to be sure he was fully capable of sitting there in silence for as long as it took for her to get up the nerve to speak her mind.

‘Did … did Vi tell you what we talked about last night?’ she asked, finally blurting it out with all the finesse of a firstie.

His expression did not change. ‘Why don’t you tell me?’ he suggested.

Hermione blew air out. He wasn’t going to make this easy for her—but that wasn’t his job, was it?

‘I am in need of training, sir,’ she said honestly. ‘I have some experience as a submissive, but there is much I still need to learn, and I would like to ask you to help me.’

His eyebrows arched. ‘You wish to train with us as Kelly did? To live with us and submit sexually?’

‘No!’ Hermione said hurriedly. ‘I’m sorry, sir, I expressed myself poorly.’ She took a deep breath.
‘Vi said it is possible for a submissive to undergo training that is not primarily sexual in nature. That is the sort of training which I would ask you to provide for me.’

His finely shaped head tilted slightly to one side. ‘And what is the putative purpose of this non-sexual training you seek?’ he inquired.

Hermione’s eyes lowered, and she spoke the next bit to her knees. ‘I would like to become a proper submissive for Severus Snape.’

‘Hermione, there will be a time for lowered eyes, but not when we are having a discussion about your future,’ he said, and she looked up into his stern face. ‘If Master Severus wishes for you to have training with me, why did he not approach me himself, as is customary?’

Hermione’s hands twisted in her lap. ‘I’m telling it badly!’ she said, distressed. ‘I’m sorry, but you make me nervous.’

He made no response to this.

Hermione took a deep breath and tried again. ‘Perhaps I should tell it from the beginning,’ she said tentatively, and she received a brief nod of agreement from him.

‘Perhaps you should.’

So she told it all, tracing the history of her relationship with Severus Snape from the night in the kitchen at Grimmauld Place to the previous night. She spoke without interruption for more than half an hour, and at one point, Master Claudius stood and poured a glass of water for her from a silver pitcher on the drinks tray, motioning for her to continue speaking as he did so.

‘He has told me that he made mistakes with me,’ she said as her tale wound down, ‘but I’ve realised that it’s not my place to focus on those things. My responsibility at this point is to become the very best submissive I can be—to change the things I can change and leave the rest to him.’

Master Claudius turned the second armchair before the desk to face her and sat down. ‘Thank you for sharing those things with me,’ he said with perfect sincerity, and Hermione felt a lurch of thankfulness for his words. ‘At this point, I am seriously considering your request, but there are some points I must make clear to you before I decide.’

Hermione took a long drink from her water glass and replaced it on the table beside her chair. ‘Yes, sir,’ she said, giving him her full attention.

‘The first is this,’ he said gravely. ‘You do understand, do you not, that I cannot guarantee that your training with me will result in your heart’s desire? I cannot promise that it will result in Master Severus accepting you as his submissive again.’

Hermione knew this—of course she knew it! —but she had a very difficult time hearing it spoken aloud and agreeing with it. She stared at Master Claudius, feeling the lead weight in her chest where her heart had been.

‘We cannot even proceed in our discussion until you acknowledge what I have said, Hermione,’ he informed her, and though he spoke with gentleness, there was an implacability about his tone that reminded her achingly of Severus.

‘I understand.’ she said, forcing the words through her constricted throat. ‘I know that what he chooses to do is outside of my control—and yours, too.’
‘Good,’ he said. ‘The second thing you must understand is that if I agree to this arrangement, then I become your Dominant, even if we are not sexually involved with one another. If you agree to submit to me in training, that means that you are not to be with another Dominant in any capacity without my permission, is that clear?’

Hermione’s eyes widened at this. So even though she wouldn’t be sharing his bed or receiving sexual satisfaction at his hand, Master Claudius would be in charge of her relationships with other men in the D/s world. She hadn’t considered that.

‘That means that even if Master Severus offers you a session or a night in his bed, you are not to accept him without my permission. Can you agree to that?’ He watched her closely, studying her face.

‘Yes, I can agree to that,’ she said slowly. ‘Do you think you would give me permission to go to him, if he asked?’

He gave a shrug. ‘It would depend on your progress,’ he said. ‘If you deserved the reward, then I would likely give my permission.’

Hermione considered this. How would Severus feel if he knew she was training with another Dominant? Well, hadn’t he suggested it himself? But how would he feel if she had to seek another Dom’s permission to sleep with him? The very notion gave her a shiver, though whether it was of dread or delight, she could not have said.

‘A corollary to that rule would be that in your life apart from Roissy House, you will not so much as go out on a vanilla date—much less engage in vanilla sexual intercourse—without my express permission. Can you submit in this, as well?’

Hermione was surprised. She had not realised to what extent Master Claudius would ask her to hand over her will. She would willingly have given this much to Severus, though, so it would be good experience to give it to the man who would agree to mould her into a proper submissive. It wasn’t as if she had a social life anyway, was it?

‘I can agree to that,’ she said. Then, looking down to mask her embarrassment, she asked in a small voice, ‘Will you control my orgasms, as well?’

He sat back, his manner seeming somewhat more relaxed as he allowed his Dominant nature to rise to the fore. ‘Not for now,’ he said. ‘For now, you may be in charge of your own sexual satisfaction. As we go forward, I will certainly require you to go through periods of sexual abstinence. Whether I will eventually assume control of when and how you orgasm will depend on how matters progress.’

Hermione nodded, ignoring her flush of discomfiture at this frank sexual conversation with Vi’s husband. She was asking him to take responsibility for her training, and he would derive little personal satisfaction from it that she could discern. Severus had told her that it was a matter of satisfaction to a Dominant to have a submissive submit to his will—that the submission was an end in itself—but it was hard for her to comprehend a reward that did not involve sexual pleasure.

And maybe—just maybe—that was a big part of her problem.

‘When we are in company with others of our community, you will wear my training collar, and you will follow the rules I set for you,’ he said. ‘On party weekends, we will discuss beforehand what you will be permitted to do and what decisions you will be permitted to make on your own behalf, without checking in with me. There will be times when Violet will provide your instruction, but as you have already sought her out as a mentor, I do not think you will have any difficulty with that.’
He sat forward, his gaze intense. ‘Are these conditions all acceptable to you, Hermione?’

‘Yes, sir,’ she said, her voice stronger now.

‘Good.’ He twisted to retrieve a brown leather book from his desktop and put it in her hands, beginning to summarise the contents of its front page as she began to read it. ‘You will spend your weekends in residence with us, unless you have previous permission to be elsewhere. You will keep a daily diary in this journal, of which I own the twin, in which you will record your meals, your hours of sleep, and any occurrence of masturbation. You will also write a minimum of one thousand words daily about your thoughts and emotions, as well as anything of significance that happens in your work day or in your interactions with other people. If I have comments or suggestions, I will write them here. Do you understand?’

Hermione nodded, and he stood abruptly, walking behind his desk. He opened a drawer and withdrew from it a red patent leather collar, just like the one Kell had worn for everyday wear. ‘When you are in Roissy House or otherwise in my presence, you will wear this collar. For party weekends, we’ll see about providing something more appropriate for dress-wear.’

He stopped speaking, and Hermione caught her breath. Don’t let him change his mind! she prayed. Submitting to Master Claudius wasn’t her first choice, but she would do it if it would prepare her to be the submissive Severus Snape wanted her to be. Please don’t let him change his mind!

Claudius looked into her eyes, and for the first time, Hermione felt the full force of his Dominance. She responded instinctively, giving him her full attention, waiting to hear what he would say.

‘Are you ready to accept my training collar and the privileges and restrictions that come with it?’ he asked her gravely.

‘Yes, sir, I am,’ she answered, meaning it.

He stepped around the desk, and she rose too, as if drawn to him. ‘Then you may kneel for me,’ he said.

Kneel for him? Kneel for someone other than Severus?

You’ll do it if you want him back, the voice in her mind advised, and Hermione knew it was true. She knelt, leaving the journal on the seat of her chair as she did so.

She assumed the submissive’s pose as well as she could fully clothed, and after a moment, she felt fingers on the hair at her nape. She began to raise her hands to help, but something told her not to do it—he would ask if he required her assistance. At last, her hair was gathered in a clump at the back of her head, and Master Claudius placed the collar about her neck, fastening it with sure hands. She tried not to think of the night her first collar had been given to her—no, dwelling in the past would not get her where she wanted to go, and she wouldn’t give in to the temptation to dwell in those bittersweet memories! Then the collar was in place, and she was aware of her new Dominant straightening himself.

‘You will always wear your hair up when you are with me,’ he said crisply. ‘I find it bothersome. Do you understand?’

‘Yes, sir,’ she said clearly.

‘When you come to stay with us, you will wear skirts at all times,’ he continued. ‘You will not wear knickers. I will not personally check for your compliance, but I may have Violet do so at random intervals. Do you understand these instructions?’
‘Yes, sir,’ she repeated, knowing this was a common requirement for a submissive in training and struggling to push thoughts of Severus Snape from her mind.

‘Then you may rise and look at me, Hermione.’

She did so, finding that in these conditions, in his element, the physical beauty of Master Claudius’ face was melting, and she responded to it as a bedazzled woman, with a shy smile.

‘Would you like to seal our bargain with a hug, or would you prefer not?’ he asked quietly.

‘I would like the hug, sir, thank you,’ she said promptly, and she was immediately enveloped in the protective arms of the man in whose keeping she had just placed all of her hopes and dreams. He was much the same height as the professor, though he was broader and heavier, and she automatically catalogued these facts even as she surrendered to the feelings of safety evoked by the warmth of his embrace.

‘Good girl,’ Master Claudius murmured into her ear, and Hermione rested her cheek for a moment on his chest, acknowledging this turning point in her life.
Chapter 78

For the Potions Master’s Amusement

Chapter 78: Her Way Clear

It wasn’t easy. She hadn’t supposed it would be—not really—but she wasn’t prepared for how difficult it was to open herself up to Master Claudius’ presence in her life. She thought of Severus Snape every day and longed for him with her whole being, but he had all but pushed her into the arms of another Dominant. Fine. She was determined to demonstrate her willingness to learn, so by Circe, she would make a good job of training with Claudius. She was thankful that she spent four days a week out of the presence of her training Dominant, for in the beginning, she often felt resistant and resentful, and such emotions were much harder to hide in person.

Her first week of journal entries went well enough, but over the weekend, staying with the Claudius family in their rooms at Roissy House, she was confounded by how emotionally intrusive he was. Oh, it wasn’t as if he walked in on her in the bathroom or interrupted her heart-to-heart conversations with Vi. It was, instead, in their long conversations together about her life before she had agreed to wear the red patent leather training collar. In these discussions, he found a way to quiz her and demand further detail and explication until he brought her face to face with the same question, over and over again: What had been her error, her fault, in every situation where she had come away dissatisfied? And this intensive scrutiny was not confined only to her past interactions with Severus Snape, no; it was given to every situation from her previous experience in which she ever expressed disappointment to Master Claudius.

Simply put, it made her as cross as a bear.

‘Oh, what does it matter?’ she demanded one Saturday afternoon, lunging to her feet and pacing to the door and back again in front on the desk where he sat, looking as serene and unruffled as ever.

‘Is it your contention that I ask you questions for the purpose of hearing myself talk?’ he inquired, and his tone held enough warning for Hermione to stop in her tracks and look dispiritedly into his face.

‘No, of course not, sir,’ she said. He didn’t have to do this, she reminded herself. He was giving up his free time, time he could be spending in some more pleasurable way than listening to her whinging. ‘But what can it possibly matter, all this raking up of old grievances?’

His head tilted slightly to one side, his grey eyes intent. ‘If it is your purpose to blunder through life feeling like a perpetual victim, there can be no useful purpose served by examining past experiences,’ he said evenly. ‘But in that case, you can scarcely have need of my services. I do not train victims, Hermione.’

She flushed angrily, her fists clenching at her sides. ‘I’m not a victim!’ she responded shrilly, conscious that she was raising her voice more than was strictly necessary.

‘Then perhaps all of these instances of ill treatment you have endured in the past have their genesis elsewhere,’ he said calmly, disregarding her defiant posture and less than respectful tone. ‘It is not uncommon for a young person to be easily silenced by an adult, Hermione. We are taught from the cradle to respect our elders, and it is a difficult thing to make the leap from childhood to adulthood and to make our voices heard.’
Hermione sagged into the armchair she had deserted, her brow furrowed, and she picked at the fabric of her cotton skirt, pleating it and smoothing it, pleating and smoothing, her mind working over what Master Claudius had said. Could it be as simple as that? Could her feelings of ill-usage be no more than irritation caused by having her thoughts and opinions disregarded or worse, discounted, due to her youth?

‘But that wouldn’t make sense with Harry and Ron,’ she said, raising her eyes to his face. ‘They frequently ignored me, too.’

Claudius’ eyebrows arched. ‘Surely you’re not of the opinion that age discrimination is the only problem you face?’

Hermione stared at him, her jaw dropping in indignation. ‘Are you suggesting sex discrimination?’ she demanded.

He inclined his head minutely. ‘Very good, Hermione,’ he said quietly.

‘They wouldn’t do that!’ she cried. ‘Well,’ she amended conscientiously, ‘Harry wouldn’t. Ron has some odd ideas.’

‘I will have to bow to your knowledge of your friends’ personalities, for I know only what I have read in the newspapers,’ Claudius remarked. ‘Still, in my conversations with young women who wish to be submissives, this is a recurring theme: They have been disregarded all of their lives because they are female.’

Hermione frowned, leaning forward. ‘But sir,’ she said, ‘isn’t that part and parcel of being a submissive, as well? To be …’ She shrugged, not knowing how to finish her sentence.

Master Claudius’ eyes never wavered from her face. ‘Please,’ he said courteously, ‘complete your thought.’

Hermione took a breath. ‘All right,’ she said. ‘It seems to me as if the women in this community are, by and large, treated almost like children, or like brainless ornaments, by the men. The men retire to the Dominants’ Study and talk about manly things while the women are left to discuss women’s concerns in the parlour, as if we were living in the nineteenth century, or something. And Severus expected me to join the other submissives and sit idly by while the war went on—how could he have expected me to do that?’

Once again, she had grown shrill, but Master Claudius’ gaze had grown only more intense as he listened to her. ‘Have any of the women of this community ever communicated to you dissatisfaction with the things of which you speak?’ he asked her.

‘No, but I wouldn’t expect them to. Wouldn’t they be in trouble if they did?’

‘Not one submissive in Roissy House is held against her will, Hermione—such a thing would never be tolerated here. Each submissive is with her Dominant of her own choice. Have you discussed these matters with one of them? With Violet? Or Taffy? Or Elinore?’

Hermione shook her head, and the untidy knot of hair at her nape threatened to spill from its confining pins. ‘No, I haven’t. I don’t have to. It’s obvious to me that they’re content with matters as they stand.’

‘Is it your belief that these women are not permitted to voice contrary opinions or beliefs to their Dominants?’
Hermione paused. Did that make sense? No, it didn’t. She had seen Elinore voice contrary thoughts to Hadrian, and she knew that t and Kell had engaged in discussions with their Masters about things upon which they disagreed—but they had those discussions in private, where such license was permitted. Just because Hermione did not witness disagreements between the other couples did not mean that such disputes did not take place.

‘Well?’ Claudius said, insistent.

‘No, I know better than that. Of course they voice their opinions and beliefs to their Dominants.’

‘And do you look down on these women for behaving submissively in public?’ he asked, his voice mild, as if he had asked after her health.

‘No!’ Hermione gasped … but did she? Did she think she was somehow superior to her friends because she thought of herself as less submissive—more independent-minded? Did she think she was more intelligent than they were?

Master Claudius nodded, as if he had been reading her thoughts. ‘Yes, that’s what I suspected.’

Hermione dipped her head, feeling a touch of shame. ‘I know I’m not better than they are,’ she said miserably. ‘I just hadn’t thought it through all the way, before.’

Several minutes passed in silence, marked only by the ticking of the fine old clock in the corner of the room, and Hermione fussed with her skirt again, mulling things over. After a quarter-hour, time during which Claudius did not appear to move a single muscle, Hermione looked up at him.

‘Each submissive has an agreement with her Dominant,’ she said slowly, and Claudius gave her an equally slow nod of agreement. ‘Each couple has their own agreement; no two are the same.’

Another nod. ‘Just because I don’t know all of the particulars of another couple’s contract doesn’t mean they don’t have disagreements and work through their differences like other men and women all over the world.’ Nod. ‘The fact that the Dominants at Roissy House customarily take a glass of brandy or have a cigar in the Dominants’ Study after dinner does not mean they have no respect for the opinions of their submissives.’

Claudius stood and came around the desk, taking the armchair beside her as he had done once before, adjusting it to face her before sitting in it. ‘And what does this mean to specifically for you?’ he inquired.

Hermione closed her eyes. ‘This is hard,’ she complained.

‘What does it mean, Hermione?’ he persisted.

She sighed, concentrating and considering her words before she spoke. ‘Severus didn’t lack respect for me or my ability to reason,’ she said, her head aching a bit, as if in protest of the hard work. ‘He was more guilty of age discrimination than anything else; we had made the transition from teacher/student to Master/submissive without finishing the transition of relating to one another as adults, rather than as adult to child.’

She opened her eyes, looking into the grey eyes watching her with complete attention.

‘I must have a contract with—’ she swallowed and continued doggedly on ‘with my n-next Dominant. I must voice my absolute necessities—my deal breakers—as well as my needs and wants, and I must negotiate with my Dominant. I must not allow myself to be bowled over by his personality, because I must begin with him the way I mean to finish.’ She wet her lips and sat up straighter. ‘I have to speak up and ask for what I want and not expect my Dominant to read my mind,
because he is only a man, for all my admiration of and attraction to him. I have to be sure of myself—sure of my personhood—because the Dominant who is intimidated or put off by that part of me is not the Dominant for me.’

The smile which graced Claudius’ face then was a thing of beauty, and Hermione found herself smiling in answer. She felt as if she had just passed a difficult oral examination.

‘Good girl,’ Claudius said warmly, and Hermione felt a surge of gratification. ‘I am very proud of the work you’ve done today,’ he added. ‘You may have the evening to do with as you will, providing you are in bed by midnight. And tomorrow morning, please hand in a two thousand word essay summarising what we have discussed today and what your conclusions are.’

He stood and offered Hermione a hand to pull her to her feet, and they shared a spontaneous hug, after which Hermione left the study with a lighter step, feeling as if she had just moved a mountain, stone by solitary stone.

Three weeks after her training with Master Claudius began, there was a party weekend at Roissy House. Hermione arrived early on Friday afternoon.

‘What did you bring to wear to dinner tonight?’ Vi asked, shifting baby Marcus from her right breast to her left.

Hermione removed her red cocktail dress from her belongings. ‘I have my black one, as well, but I like this one better.’

Vi nodded; she remembered the dress. ‘That will be lovely,’ she said. ‘Now, are you ready to discuss the rules?’

Hermione nodded.

‘Master is waiting in his study to review them with you,’ Vi said, and Hermione knocked on the door before entering the now familiar room.

She advanced to Master Claudius’ side and knelt respectfully, her eyes on the floor. ‘Hello, sir,’ she said quietly.

Claudius took her chin and tilted her face up, keenly surveying her face. ‘Your eyes are bright, no dark smudges, your skin is clear—you look well, Hermione,’ he pronounced.

Hermione smiled gratefully. ‘Thank you,’ she said with genuine pleasure. ‘The time of quiet reflection before bed is helping; I’m sleeping much better.’

He gave her cheek a careless caress and nodded toward the armchair. ‘You may sit,’ he said, and she obeyed. ‘Let us review the rules for tonight’s dinner and dancing. You may interrupt if there is anything unclear to you.’

‘Yes, sir,’ Hermione answered, and she listened carefully.

‘You will follow the rules which Kelly gave you before your first party at Roissy House. In addition, you will remember that you are appearing tonight for the first time under my protection. There may be questions from people about the end of your relationship with Master Severus. You may answer any questions you feel comfortable with, but you are not required to discuss anything you don’t wish to. You may say that questions can be directed to me, and I will deal with whatever it is. Do you understand?’
‘Yes, I do,’ Hermione answered promptly.

‘You have permission to dance with anyone who asks you, but you are not required to dance. It would be very unusual for a Dominant to approach you regarding play or sexual activity tonight, but if it happens, you will decline. No play will be permitted tonight.’

‘Yes, sir,’ Hermione answered.

‘Good girl,’ he said, standing and smiling. ‘Then you may go to begin your preparations. I will see you before we go down to dinner.’ He opened his desk drawer and removed a flat black jeweller’s case, which he held out to her, and she came forward to take it. ‘This is the collar you will wear for party weekends,’ he said.

Hermione opened the case, immediately recognising the gold collar with the platinum disk inscribed *Trainee*, which she had seen Kell wear at parties during her training with Claudius. ‘Thank you,’ she said.

‘You’re welcome,’ he said soberly. ‘And as a special treat, you may wear your hair down tonight, if you wish.’

‘Thank you,’ Hermione said, genuinely touched. She knew how much he disliked her messy hair. Master Claudius was a man who prized orderliness in all things.

‘Before you join us to go downstairs, spend ten full minutes in quiet repose,’ he instructed her. ‘Centre your thoughts, and you will make us very proud tonight.’

Downstairs at Roissy House on the Friday night of a party weekend! Hermione had been afraid she would feel out of place, but she need not have worried, for all of her friends were present. Taffy flew up to her before she had taken two steps from the staircase and wrapped her up in a fragrant hug.

‘You look beautiful!’ she whispered in Hermione’s ear. Taffy held her at arm’s length and looked her over more carefully. ‘You look better than you’ve done in a year or more,’ she added. ‘Master Claudius is a good influence on you, I think.’

Hermione turned shining eyes on her two mentors, Claudius and Vi, who stood together, cool and beautiful, in conversation with Rafe. ‘They’re both good influences,’ she said.

In his turn, Rafe lifted her from her feet and twirled her once before setting her down again, his broad grin split his bearded face. ‘You look good,’ he told her seriously. ‘Are you … with them?’ He nodded meaningfully toward Claudius and Vi.

Hermione shook her head. ‘Not like that,’ she said quietly. ‘It’s all very much hands-off.’

Rafe seemed relieved. ‘Whatever you’re doing, it’s agreeing with you,’ he said.

Hermione tilted her head slightly. ‘Are you … information gathering?’ she asked, feeling a bit hopeful. ‘Does he know?’

‘I’m not gathering information for anyone but myself,’ he told her, ‘and if he knows, it’s not because I’ve told him. It’s not as if we owl every week, or anything.’

Hermione took a step closer to him. ‘Will you tell him?’

‘I can’t let him come back here in the summer unaware—and if I don’t tell him, you can count on
Hadrian to do it. It would be a dirty trick not to tell him.’

And with that, Hermione had to be content.

She saw Kell and Reg at dinner, but had no chance to talk with them until they found her in the room where the dancing would take place. Kell was radiant in blue satin, her hair shining beneath the candlelit chandeliers. ‘Are you happy?’ she asked, squeezing Hermione’s hands. ‘Are they kind to you, Claudius and Vi?’

Hermione returned the pressure of her hands. ‘I’m content,’ she assured Kell. ‘And I haven’t been able to say that before—not ever in my life. He’s helping me in ways I didn’t know I needed to be helped.’

The musicians began to play, and Reg took her hand. ‘It wouldn’t be a party weekend if I didn’t dance with Hermione and have my ego deflated,’ he said gaily. He nodded to the chairs along the wall. ‘Wait for me there, pet,’ he said to Kell, and she went willingly, pausing only to give them each a kiss on the cheek before leaving.

Hermione waited for Reg to begin their conversation, and he did at last, after dancing in silence for what seemed a long time.

‘Claudius taught Kell a lot,’ he said. ‘He’s not a jolly sort, but he’s a serious Dom.’ He looked down into her face. ‘Are you glad to be here? To be training?’

Hermione smiled. ‘I’m very glad, Reg—thank you for caring enough to ask. Master Claudius is giving me exactly what I need, right now. I couldn’t ask for more.’

He looked at her sharply. ‘I can’t put my finger on what it is, but you’re different. Calmer, somehow. Restful. It suits you, Hermione.’

The song ended, and they stopped dancing and applauded politely, but before they could cross the floor to where Kell sat waiting, a tall blond man stepped up to them. Reg’s lips compressed into an annoyed white line, and Hermione found herself looking up into the smiling eyes of Master David, the Quidditch-playing Dom.

Saturday afternoon found Hermione curled up in a chair in the Roissy House nursery, with Vi and tin rocking chairs opposite her, their babies at their breasts, and Kell sitting on the floor, holding a soft pastel teddy in her hands. Popkin, the nursery house-elf, folded nappies in the corner as the witches talked over the happenings of the weekend.

‘Master David danced with you three times last night,’ t said to Hermione. ‘You looked as if you were having a good time.’

Hermione nodded. ‘He can be very charming—didn’t you think so, Kell?’

Kell put the teddy aside and nodded. ‘He can be, yes. In the end, I just couldn’t forget about Reggie, though.’

The other three smiled at her affectionately, and Vi said, ‘And you were right to keep on hoping, weren’t you?’

Hermione’s eyes dropped at this, and although she could feel her friends watching her, she didn’t look up. Kell had very nearly contracted an alliance with Master David before she and Reg had worked out their problems. If it had been right for Kell to keep on hoping, wasn’t it right for
Hermione to keep on hoping, as well? It had felt odd permitting David Osborn to pay court to her, however mildly. He was younger and handsomer and fitter than Severus Snape—but he wasn’t the man she loved, and her heart wasn’t really in the light-hearted flirtation.

‘It’s not disloyal,’ t said gently, and Hermione looked up directly into her t’s soft, pretty eyes.

‘It felt wrong, somehow,’ Hermione admitted.

‘Taffy is right,’ Vi said serenely, moving baby Marcus onto her shoulder and beginning to pat his back. ‘It’s good practice, Hermione. You’re taking the lessons you’re learning from Master and applying those lessons in real life situations. It’s not disloyal at all.’

Little Marcus uttered a resounding burp, earning fond praise from his mama and from Popkin, the nursery elf. Vi surrendered the blue-wrapped baby to Popkin and stood, extending a hand to Hermione.

‘Come along, so we can determine what you’ll wear for the Dungeon party tonight,’ Vi said. ‘Master prefers skin, but I know you aren’t comfortable with that idea.’

Hermione blanched, holding tightly to Vi’s hand. ‘Please don’t make me go naked,’ she said shakily. She had been able to endure the humiliation—just barely—with her Master at her side. She didn’t think she could stomach it on her own.

‘It’s not so terrible,’ Kell said, standing and coming over to hug her. ‘It was hard the first time, but after a while, you don’t think about it so much.’

Taffy slipped from her chair onto the rug at her feet, where she settled baby Daisy in a sitting position with the teddy bear, which Daisy promptly put in her mouth. ‘It’s not as if you don’t have a lovely body, Hermione,’ she said gently. ‘And it’s only the envelope, you know—your true self is within, and no one can touch you, physically or otherwise, if you don’t permit it.’

Hermione nodded miserably. ‘I know that’s true,’ she said, ‘but I can’t get over my childhood training, you know? Nice girls don’t show their knickers, much less their naked bums!"

Vi wrapped an arm about her waist and led her toward the door. ‘Master will most likely set a date by which you will agree to appear at the Dungeon party naked, and we’ll both help to prepare you for that day. But he will expect it eventually, Hermione, so you must resign yourself to it.’

That night, wearing her pink corset and the black satin knickers that went with it, she was alarmed when Master Claudius rejected her ensemble.

‘This isn’t a proper garment,’ he said, frowning as he surveyed the knickers, which knotted at her hips. ‘It won’t do. You’ll have to go without.’

Hermione gasped in consternation. Go without? Go downstairs bare below her corset? Oh, no, no, she wasn’t prepared for that!

‘Master, may I make a suggestion?’ Vi said quietly.

Claudius turned his frown to Vi, who wore a silvery blue negligee, in deference to recent childbirth. She would be expected to revert to her former Dungeon wear—or lack thereof—when she had time to recover a bit, she had confided to Hermione. For now, she took Hermione’s hand and said, ‘She has a negligee ensemble which includes a tiny black thong. Would it be permissible for her to wear it, instead?’
Claudius gave this suggestion some thought. ‘It is a proper garment?’ he asked.

‘It is, yes,’ Vi answered, and Hermione would have gladly kissed the other girl’s feet in gratitude. The thong knickers were barely there, but compared to going naked, they were a huge relief. What a near miss!

‘Then is will be acceptable,’ Claudius agreed, and when Hermione had made the change, the three of them descended to the Dungeon.

Hermione had scarcely made it to the bottom of the staircase when she was rushed by Jacquie and Diana, Professor Snape’s first student trainees. They were spectacularly nude, wearing matching platinum collars edged with diamonds and trailing leads in the hand of their Master, Robert.

‘It’s been an age!’ Diana said, looking her over closely. ‘We were so sorry to hear …’

‘But not terribly surprised,’ Jacquie added, giving Hermione’s hand a squeeze. ‘Still, we’ve been worried about you—and we’re so glad you’re here!’

Master Robert nodded at Hermione’s respectful greeting. ‘You would be welcome to spend time with us in Dorset, if Claudius gives you leave,’ he said, and Hermione knew without being told that she had just received an invitation to join in a foursome with the red-haired goddesses and their portly Master.

‘Thank you—you’re very kind,’ she responded, keeping her eyes averted and trying very hard not to show revulsion.

‘She’s not bi,’ Diana murmured to Master Robert.

‘She’s young,’ Master Robert replied, giving their leads a tug and beginning to escort them away. ‘She just may not know it, yet …’

The Dungeon was, as ever, humming with excitement, and Hermione felt her libido stirring. She was surrounded by people in various stages of undress, with exhibitions going on all around her. Someone was receiving a whipping on the St Andrew’s Cross, and she felt the heat in the pit of her stomach, wanting to experience the sting of the leather on her flesh. Further along, a Dominant was giving a demonstration of proper preparation for anal intercourse, his lubricant-slick fingers working into his submissive’s arse, her head thrown back, as if the sensation were deeply arousing. Hermione remembered the times she had worn the anal plugs, preparing for this sort of activity, and though it had never been her favourite thing, she would have willingly completed the training for her Master’s sake.

She moved on to the waxing station, where three different submissives were being decorated with coloured candle wax, including the girls Hermione had met the month before—the two who had been there for sessions with Severus. What were their names? Chassity and Ava? Each of them was playing with a Dom Hermione did not know, and she felt a vicious stab of jealousy to think these two nobodies had enjoyed the attentions of Professor Snape more recently than she had done. Her fists clenched at her sides.

‘Is there a problem?’

Hermione looked over her shoulder to find Master Claudius standing there, his cool eyes intent on her.

‘No,’ she lied, making an effort to relax her tightly clenched fists.
‘Of what possible service can I be to you if you persist in hiding your emotions from me?’ he said quietly.

Hermione felt her resistance melt in an instant, and she reached for him gratefully, wanting to feel his comforting, calming arms around her. Instead, he took her by the wrist and escorted her to one of the darkened areas. She sat down as he indicated, and he sat beside her.

‘Tell me,’ he suggested.

‘Those girls,’ she said, and the mere thought of them curled her hands to fists again. ‘I hate them.’

‘That’s a very strong reaction,’ Master Claudius said. ‘Why, may I ask?’

‘They were with him— with Severus—and I hate them!’ she said, her breath coming in short pants.

‘Were they?’ Claudius said curiously.

‘I told you they were!’ she said crossly. ‘Over Easter—they had sessions with him!’

A faint crease appeared on his brow. ‘Are you certain?’

Hermione wanted to hit him. ‘Why are you questioning me about this?’ she demanded, her voice rising with her agitation. ‘I told you all about it when I came to you for help!’

Claudius’ patience was unruffled. ‘What, exactly, can you do about it if they were with him?’

‘Nothing!’ she spat, the jealousy twisting through her insides like a malevolent worm.

‘Do you have any say in what Master Severus chooses to do or whom he chooses to see?’

Her throat ached suddenly, and she closed her eyes. ‘I have no control over what he does,’ she managed in a trembling voice.

‘And what are you learning about situations in which you have no control?’ Claudius asked, finally drawing her attention to him fully.

‘That it’s pointless to squander my energy fretting over them,’ she said, her voice stronger now.

‘What do you have control over?’ he asked, his voice gentle but insistent.

‘I have control over what I do— over my reaction,’ she replied, her voice calming, her breathing slowing as she repeated her lesson aloud to him.

‘And how does your anger and frustration over a situation in which you have no control benefit you?’ he continued.

Hermione turned her face and looked at him. ‘It doesn’t benefit me at all,’ she said. ‘What benefits me is being serene and remaining centred,’ she added. Peace began to seep into her consciousness, and she breathed deeply, welcoming it.

Master Claudius smiled at her. ‘Very good, petite,’ he said, using the endearment which she seldom earned from him. ‘Now, go sit with Chassity and Ava. Inquire after their sessions with Master Severus. And when you’ve finished your conversations with them, go up to your room and write two thousand words on what you’ve learned tonight.’

Hermione tensed. Go sit with them? Show friendliness to the girls who rated more attention from
Severus than she did? *Invite* them to gloat about it? Her lips parted to object, but Master Claudius watched her as if he fully expected her to do as he asked.

And with nervous perspiration breaking out on her forehead, Hermione stood to do just that.

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Excerpt from the journal of Miss Hermione Granger:

… I suppose the most illuminating realisation for me in this exercise came when Chassity and Ava told me they had neither of them been in a session with Professor Snape. I was gobsmacked. All of the agonies through which I have put myself since the night I last spoke with him—at least those related to Chassity and Ava—have been unnecessary, and I suspect, Master Claudius, that you are fully aware of this. It is probably the reason why you gave me this assignment. It is certainly a crystal clear illustration of why it is counter-productive for a person—no, for me—to make assumptions based what I *think* I know. Those two girls had been reintroduced Professor Snape here, at Roissy House, and they had been present with him at meals. They said that, to their knowledge, he had not been involved with any submissive in any way during his stay over the Easter break. They were under the impression that he spent his time with Hadrian. They said neither of them had received any individual attention from him, though they intimated they would not be averse to the opportunity. For that, how can I, of all people, blame them? I certainly have experienced the power and intensity of those attentions, and though I am loath to see another submissive receive them, I cannot condemn a woman for desiring him. It would be the purest hypocrisy, coming from me.

In the end, I think I probably answered more questions with Chassity and Ava than I asked. They had heard I had been the professor’s submissive, and they were keen to know what it had been like. I answered them as politely as I could and excused myself to complete my assignment.

So, has Severus Snape been ‘sessioning’ submissives? I don’t know, do I? And it’s a pointless exercise in futility to waste my energy on speculation. First of all, it’s none of my business. Second, regardless of how he chooses to spend his leisure time, my well-being and development are not furthered by making him my focus. He is my past. He has not chosen to be part of my present, and I do not know what the future holds. It is my business to make of myself the best possible submissive I can be, for that is my desire. If I am fortunate enough in the future to engage the attention of Professor Snape, it will be *his* good fortune to have attracted the attention of a woman who knows her own mind, who is fully cognisant of who she is and where she wants to go. I will be able to meet him, or any other Dominant who interests me, on an even plane, as his equal, which will make my offer of submission all the sweeter to him, should I choose to tender it.

I thank you for this writing assignment with all my heart, sir. It has been of monumental benefit to me, for I see my way ahead more clearly. I have learned from you that self-knowledge and self-worth are the most powerful tools a submissive may have in her personal armoury. I am better prepared now to go forward in my training with a refined purpose.

Respectfully,

Hermione

Hermione put aside her quill and knelt on the rug beside her bed in her room in the Claudius family flat. Assuming the submissive’s pose, she closed her eyes and breathed deeply, beginning the process of clearing her mind for sleep. She was an intelligent woman, successful in her career, sure of her wants and needs, and preparing herself to make her way through the world in quest of her heart’s
desire.
The portly wizard stood at the front of a room crowded with desks, computer towers, monitors, keyboards, printers, and on their feet by their desks, the Ministry of Magic’s Information Technology engineers.

‘Good job, people!’ the wizard cried, his voice made conspicuous by a distinct American twang.
‘Nine months into this project, you have completed the first phase of implementation, and we go live first thing Monday morning. Give yourselves a round of applause, then off with you! You deserve an early start to your weekend!’

Hermione obediently joined in the round of applause, then slung her bag over her shoulder, checking her desk to make sure all was tidy.

‘You’re coming to the Leaky for a pint, aren’t you?’

She turned to Tom Burns, whose desk was to the left of hers. ‘Thanks, Tom, but I’m going to a party tonight. Another time I will.’

Patty Wooster came up on her other side. ‘The whole department is going,’ Patty informed her. ‘You have to come, even if it’s only for one drink.’

Hermione looked from one co-worker to the other. She wanted to arrive at Roissy House in plenty of time to primp for the dinner and dance portion of the gala weekend, but she was torn. She had been through an intense nine months with her co-workers, and they had accomplished something significant—the least she could do was go out for a drink with them. Besides, they’d been dismissed an hour early. She had plenty of time to stop off at the Leaky for a pint before leaving for Roissy House.

They were a silly, boisterous group at a large, round table in the wizarding pub. She nursed her pint and chatted with Tom and Patty. At length, she glanced at her wristwatch and saw it was almost five—it was time to say good-bye. But before she could do so, a group of men entered the pub, furtive-looking wizards in black cloaks.

‘Ooh, look who’s deigning to drink with mere mortals,’ Tom said spitefully, a bit the worse for wear after three pints in quick succession.

‘Who are they?’ Hermione asked, curious.

‘Well, I don’t know about the younger bloke, but the other two are Unspeakables,’ Patty put in. ‘Tom is just angry because he couldn’t even get an interview with the Department of Mysteries.’

‘I heard they’re recruiting,’ Tom said gloomily. ‘You’d think they’d be interested in someone from Information Technology. Isn’t that what they’re all about? Information?’

Hermione chuckled. ‘I don’t think computers represent the sort of information which interests the Unspeakables,’ she said, amused.

‘I wouldn’t be so sure,’ Tom sniffed. ‘Rumour has it that they’re researching the magical “answer” to
computers—it seems the Minister is none too happy with bringing Muggle ways into the Ministry.’

Hermione stood. ‘Well, the Wizengamot overruled him, didn’t they? And I, for one, am glad they did, because I like my job, even if I have to spent every day with you lot!’

They laughed, even Tom cheering up a bit, and Hermione said her goodbyes, her mind already rushing ahead to her second party weekend in training with Master Claudius.

That night, feeling she was looking her best in her black party dress, Hermione was approached for dances by three different wizards who seemed quite interested in her. Hermione had no qualms about relaxing and enjoying herself; she could feel eyes following her every move, and she knew Claudius, Reg, and Rafe were all keeping her under surveillance. It felt good to be cared for to that extent by men whom she admired and respected, and she knew that she was reflecting that deep satisfaction to the people around her. Never before in her life had she felt so confident—so grounded—and for the first time in her experience, it did not surprise her when men responded to her as if they were attracted to her.

David Osborne was her first partner, and he asked her if she would be permitted to play at the Dungeon party the next night.

‘It hasn’t been discussed yet,’ she said truthfully. ‘But I don’t know if I’m ready for that, to be honest.’

Master David smiled down at her, merriment dancing in his eyes, reminding her of Reg. No wonder he had been tempting to Kell …

‘But it’s not as if you’re a novice,’ he said. ‘You’ve been collared before.’

Hermione averted her eyes from his and studied the placket of his dress robes. ‘Yes, I have been collared before—but I’m taking things very slowly, this time around.’

His hand tightened at her waist, just enough to add emphasis to his words. ‘I hope, Hermione, that when you decide you’re ready to play, you’ll consider my invitation,’ he said, and his tone was so earnest, Hermione could not doubt his sincerity.

‘Thank you,’ she replied. ‘I will.’

Alain Devereux was the next to ask her to dance, and she was pleased to accept. He was a small, elegant man, with sleek dark hair and eyes. Hermione had met him at dinner, introduced by Hadrian, but she learned much more about him as they danced. He was thirty years old, never married, six years in the lifestyle, in England for a three year stint with the French Ministry, as an attaché to their consulate in the U.K.

‘I hope you’ll enjoy your stay,’ Hermione told him, liking the way his eyes crinkled when he smiled.

‘How could I fail to do so?’ he said. ‘Roissy House is without peer for D/s activity—save, of course, for the first Chateau Roissy, in my country—and the submissives in England are beautiful.’

At that moment, their dance ended, and he lifted her hand to his lips. ‘Perhaps, one day you will visit France, and it will be my honour to escort you to Chateau Roissy.’

Almost against her will, Hermione was charmed. She wondered what sort of Dominant this man would make. ‘Thank you,’ she said, feeling a bit flustered.
Her third partner was called Rufus Desmond, a Dominant visiting from Edinburgh. His heavy Scot accent reminded Hermione pleasantly of Minerva McGonagall, whose accent only grew that thick when she was agitated.

‘I’ll be staying at Roissy House for six weeks or so, learning about how the community operates,’ he told her, trodding upon her foot. ‘Ach, sorry, Hermione. Dancing is not my talent.’

Hermione laughed and suggested that they drink some punch, instead, and they settled at a small table and talked. Rufus would learn about what enchantments were used to secure the house, how the board of directors was organised, and the particulars of the Dungeon construction, for he hoped to endow a similar institution in Scotland.

‘Oh, my,’ Hermione said. ‘That will be very expensive! I believe this community was set up when a wealthy man left his entire estate in trust for Roissy House.’

Rufus smiled modestly, his ruddy cheeks dimpling above his neat Van Dyke beard. He had hazel eyes and reddish gold hair, already receding. He was of middling height and a bit on the heavy side, but Hermione liked his demeanour.

‘It may be a wee bit expensive,’ he agreed mildly. ‘I can afford it.’

Hermione studied his face, looking for some sign of pride or gloating in his wealth, but she saw none, and it made her like him even more. He might not be as fit as Master David, nor as handsome as Master Alain, but Master Rufus was possessed of a gentle appeal which Hermione found very trustworthy.

‘Do you live here?’ he asked her hopefully. ‘Will I be seeing you for meals and such?’

‘I’m in training with the Claudius family,’ she explained, ‘but I’m only here on the weekends. We sometimes eat with the household, but more often, we eat in their rooms.’ He looked so disappointed that she had to smile. ‘Never fear, though; there are at least two submissives in training who spend quite a bit of time here—young ladies called Ava and Chassity—so you won’t be without charming company.’

Frank hazel eyes gazed into hers. ‘Not so charming as you, I’ll warrant,’ he said. ‘I’ll have to be content to see you when I can. Will your training be … completed, any time soon?’

Claudius and Vi approached then, arm in arm, and Hermione stood in response to Claudius’ extended hand. ‘Good night, Master Rufus,’ she said, and contentedly left the party with her training Master, the question unanswered, and her emotions bestirred by so much admiration.

Master Claudius studied her above his steepled fingers. ‘And we are in agreement that you will appear at the July Dungeon party nude?’ he inquired.

Hermione shifted restlessly in her chair, avoiding his icy blue eyes. ‘Do you consider it a necessary part of my training?’ she asked, already knowing the answer.

‘I do,’ he answered curtly.

Hermione inhaled deeply, seeking to calm her inner agitation with slow, even breathing. ‘Then I’ll do as you ask,’ she replied.

‘Of course you will,’ he said briskly, rising. ‘Now, go to see Violet; she has your garments for tonight’s party.’
Hermione remained in her seat, alarmed. ‘What are they?’

He looked down at her steadily. ‘Nothing to cause you alarm or discomfort,’ he assured her. ‘Something to help prepare you for July.’

Hermione almost smiled when she saw the fetish garments Claudius had chosen for her to wear tonight. The leather straight jacket was shocking pink, a nice foil for the black straps and buckles which festooned the garment …

‘But it leaves my breasts uncovered!’ she said. ‘Naked!’

‘But there are these,’ Vi said soothingly, presenting the black leather pasties. ‘They cover your nipples, see?’

Hermione nodded, lifting the garment and seeing the array of straps festooning the back. She held it up before her in front of the mirror, imagining the shocking pink leather against her fair skin, her breasts on display—save for the little scraps of leather to cover the peaks—and her arms bound, useless. The idea appealed to her, and a fire of want kindled, low in her abdomen. The black strap which would bisect her sternum, running between her breasts, ended in a black collar, which reminded her of the one she had all but thrown back at the person who had given it to her. She swallowed, willing the memory away.

‘Will I wear my thong knickers?’ she asked past the lump in her throat.

‘Oh, no,’ Vi responded, coming forward with another item in her hands. ‘For the bottom, there’s this.’ She spoke the word with such reverence that Hermione turned to her expectantly, and was surprised to see Vi holding an odd conglomeration of leather and … yes, those were heart-shaped, golden locks! ‘Isn’t it lovely?’ Vi asked, raising her face, flushed with happiness, to Hermione’s. ‘It was my very own.’

Hermione replaced the straight jacket on the bed and took from Vi’s hands the object of her fond reminiscences. ‘Your very own what?’ she asked, trying to sound respectful.

‘Why, my very own chastity belt, of course,’ she replied, sounding surprised that Hermione had to ask such a thing. ‘Have you never seen one, before?’

Hermione felt her lips part in shock. ‘You’re joking!’

Vi shook her head once. ‘I’m not, I promise you.’ She unfastened the button at the waist of Hermione’s skirt and unfastened the zip, allowing the skirt to drop to the floor, puddling at her feet. That left Hermione standing in naught save her blouse and her stay-up stockings. ‘You won’t want the stockings, tonight,’ Vi told her. ‘You’ll go barefoot to the Dungeon. And you’ll want to make sure you’re freshly shaved—the belt covers more of your bum than the thong knickers, but it shows a bit more of your pudendum.’

Hermione stepped into the spaces Vi indicated, and the garment was pulled up to her waist, the leather gusset-piece thicker than the other straps, it’s curved edges covering the area of her quim in the front and up to the middle of her bum in the back. The strap holding this piece attached to the waist-strap, completing the job of hiding her arse crack. The straps were adjustable, and Vi set about fitting the garment perfectly to Hermione, snapping the little heart locks until she was locked up as tight as a medieval wife whose husband was away on the Crusades.

‘The privacy strap was replaced, of course, but the rest of the belt is as it was when Master gave it to me,’ Vi said, standing behind Hermione and admiring it in the mirror.
‘But why am I wearing it?’ Hermione asked, thinking to herself that as a covering, the chastity belt hid her private parts—mostly—and for tonight, that was really her only concern.

‘Because you’re beginning a period of abstinence, Hermione,’ Claudius said from the doorway behind her, and Hermione had only to shift her gaze to meet his eyes in the mirror. ‘For the next month, you will be restricted to two orgasms a week, both of which you must report in your journal. This is not as restrictive as it might be—certainly not as restrictive as what Violet agreed to, when she accepted the gift of the chastity belt—but I feel that it would be unrealistic to expect you to go completely without sexual gratification when you do not have the advantage of constant supervision, and you spend four days a week away from us.’

He advanced into the room until he stood directly behind her, and he laid his hands upon her shoulders.

‘The chastity belt is a symbol—I will not require you to wear it, except for tonight’s Dungeon party—but it is also a signal to your admirers of the phase of training you have entered. This abstinence will go on for a minimum of one month, and at the end of that time, if I am satisfied with your progress, then we may dispense with it—or, we may continue on until I am fully satisfied. Do you understand?’

Hermione nodded, feeling slightly apprehensive. Up until this point, Master Claudius had placed no restriction on her masturbation or the number of her climaxes, and she knew it would be difficult to deny herself.

‘You may, if you wish, indulge in touching tonight. Your hands will be bound, but I have no objection if you wish to allow an admirer to peel away the nipple-covers to enjoy having your breasts pleasured.’ Hermione flushed a bit, slightly aroused by Master Claudius’ words, and not entirely comfortable with feeling this way in his presence. ‘I also have no objection if you wish to allow someone to finger you beneath the gusset piece. Of course, if you orgasm, that will count as one of the two you may have this week, and if you come twice, then you will have long, tense week ahead of you, won’t you?’

Hermione was aroused, now, feeling as if her body had betrayed her by responding to Claudius’ voice and suggestions. Still, he held her eyes in the mirror, his mien unchanged from how it had been when they were discussing the boring events of her work week. So she concentrated on his calm, and she slowly brought her own raging reactions under control.

‘I understand,’ she said after a moment.

He smiled. ‘Wearing these things tonight will be fun—you’ll see. And it’s your last step before full nudity, which you will experience next month—and I predict you will end by enjoying that, as well.’ He released Hermione’s shoulders and held a hand out to Vi, who came up and wrapped an arm around his waist, looking up at him adoringly. ‘We look forward to seeing your nakedness, Hermione. We will appreciate the beauty of your body very much.’

This made her face flame. Did he mean that he wanted to look at her naked body? Did he desire her? It confused her, sometimes, but she tried not to think about it too much. Master Claudius was never overtly sexual with her, and Vi showed no signs of jealousy, which was reassuring.

But Vi wasn’t jealous of Kell, was she? In fact, she and Claudius both had sex with Kell, all three of them, together, her less than helpful inner voice reminded her.

This led to another thought. Did Vi desire her?
Stop it! she scolded the disruptive voice, and was relieved when Vi and her husband left the room, obviously headed for their bedroom, no doubt to share their memories about their experiences with the chastity belt.

Oh, bloody hell! They’d left her locked up in the damn belt! How was she supposed to shave with this thing on?

Are you a witch, or aren’t you? the nag in her head inquired, and she marched off to prepare for her evening as best she could. Damned if she would interrupt her host and hostess now!

As usual, Master Claudius was right. Being in the Dungeon, her arms bound, her quim locked up tight, she was very, very titillated. She was simultaneously free of responsibility, because she had no use of her hands, and desirous of using those hands to touch herself, for everything excited her. Wearing the shocking pink straight jacket heightened all of her senses in a way she could not explain, and before she had been in the Dungeon for fifteen minutes, her quim was slick and aching as if her Master had been tormenting her for an hour with no relief.

Podgy Master Robert had Diana and Jacqueline on display, bound side by side on two St Andrew’s Crosses, and he was flogging them in tandem. Hermione envied the girls very much the sting of the cat o’nine tails, and shuddered with them as they reached near simultaneous orgasms, their voices ringing through the cavernous room.

‘Coming to climax without being touched is not unheard of, you know,’ Claudius murmured into her ear when the echoes of the red-haired submissives’ cries died away, ‘and if you come from mere watching, that will still count as one.’

Hermione shot a speaking glance at Claudius, who responded with a crooked smile. Vi, nude for the first time since Marcus’ birth—and looking very well, indeed—stepped up to dry the perspiration from Hermione’s face with a sweet-smelling handkerchief before holding a straw to her mouth, so she could sip water.

‘You’re doing fine,’ Vi whispered.

Claudius turned aside to speak with Rafe, and joined Vi at Hermione’s side.

‘Oh, a chastity belt!’ t cried. ‘Vi, this was the one Claudius gave you before he collared you!’

Vi murmured her agreement, and Hermione said, ‘You wore this for him before he collared you?’

‘Oh yes,’ Vi answered. ‘It was a requirement I had to complete before he would accept my offer of submission.’ Vi gazed raptly at Hermione’s lower half until Hermione wanted to kick her. ‘I wore it for two months.’

Hermione gasped, and t said, ‘Two months? How could you bear it?’

‘Master was wonderful,’ Vi replied. ‘I stayed with him the entire time, and he would sometimes touch me and kiss me, but he did not permit me to orgasm. When it became difficult for one or both of us, he would read to me until we were … calmer.’

‘Did he go without for two months, as well?’ Hermione asked.

Vi shook her head in the negative. ‘He offered,’ she said, ‘but I didn’t want him to suffer through that. It was my choice. I told him he didn’t have to abstain, but he restricted himself to once a week —and it was one of the requirements that I participate, when he … did it.’ She sighed. ‘That was the
hardest part—*not* to come when I sucked him off. It's *so* arousing.’

Taffy nodded her agreement, and Hermione decided she needed *much* more practice at fellatio. She remembered her first time to do it, kneeling between her Master’s knees in his study, and how he had taken his pleasure from her. She had been unsure, but he had been patiently instructive, as well as deliciously primal. She turned slightly away from Vi and t, who were now talking about their babies, and she indulged in her memories. Then a voice spoke at her shoulder.

‘What did you decide, about playing tonight?’ David Osborne inquired, and Hermione turned to him. He was looking down at her intently, but very correctly, keeping his eyes on her face as they conversed. ‘I asked Claudius, and he said it’s up to you.’

Hermione looked up into the handsome face, seeing in her peripheral vision the broad, muscled chest, naked above the black leather trousers he wore, and she knew that if he touched her with those strong, capable fingers, she would come at the first contact. If would have nothing to do with *him*, and everything to do with her over-stimulated physical state. And what fun would that be for him? Even more important, what would he expect in return? She had no desire to kiss him or suck him, and that would be the only fair exchange, wouldn’t it?

‘Thank you, David, but I’ve decided not to play tonight,’ she answered as kindly as she could. ‘It was sweet of you to ask me.’

He gave her a rueful smile. ‘Well, don’t forget you were my first choice,’ he said, and she nodded.

Alain Devereux spent a pleasant half hour sitting with her at the refreshment tables upstairs, feeding her strawberries and giving her sips of fizzy drinks with a straw.

‘But it’s a charming way to spend an evening,’ he assured her when she thanked him and insisted that he go downstairs to join the other guests. Nevertheless, he went, and Hermione knew that he, as well as David, liked her—perhaps even *preferred* her—but neither of them were enthralled. No, not any more than she was with them.

The last of her evening she spent with Rufus Desmond, who sought her out and invited her to sit with him through a Japanese rope bondage demonstration.

‘It’s never appealed to me personally,’ he admitted, ‘but I think it’s fascinating to watch.’

Hermione sat with him, and they discussed many things, only one of which was rope bondage. Hermione was aware of the people around her, the increasing sexual tension, the increasing number of people slipping into the shadows to complete sex acts, but talking with Master Rufus kept her calm, and she was pleased, at the end of the evening, that she had not used up one of her allotted orgasms tonight in a way which she would deeply regret, come morning.

Rufus escorted her through the Dungeon, and Hermione saw David, sweat gleaming on his shoulders, whipping Chassity. Further on, in a darkened alcove, she saw Alain Devereux with a woman over his knee, and he was administering a spanking. Hermione turned her eyes away, not permitting herself to remember her bare-bottom spankings at the hand of Severus Snape.

At last they ascended the stairs and stood together in the wide marble corridor.

‘I’d ask to kiss your hand, but they’re … otherwise occupied,’ Rufus said seriously. ‘May I be so bold as to kiss your cheek?’

Hermione looked at the hazel-eyed Dominant. Together, they had just watched a naked man rope-binding and sexually teasing a naked woman. Yet he approached her as if he were courting a
nineteenth century virgin. She found it to be very sweet.

‘Of course, Rufus,’ she said, ‘if you’ll allow me to kiss yours, as well.’

Gravely, he kissed her cheek, then presented his for her to do the same.

‘Good night,’ they said, and Hermione turned from him and walked to the staircase.

It was the last week in June, and Hermione had been on an errand for her department head. Returning at mid-morning, she was crossing the Ministry Atrium to the lifts, when she saw a familiar dark figure.

Instantly, her heart tripped into triple time, and she suddenly felt as if she had missed a step climbing down the stairs. He turned his head, and she saw the sharp, hooked nose in profile—there was no question, it was Severus Snape.

*Don’t make a fool of yourself,* she cautioned as she hurried across the floor. *Remember to stay centred!*

But when she stopped by his side and smelled his aftershave, she felt all sense of control slip from beneath her feet. ‘Hello, sir,’ she said simply.

He jerked about to face her, and she drank in every detail. He was wearing his best robes—not the fancy dress ones, but his smartest everyday ones—and he was freshly showered and shaved. His sizable nostrils flared, and it seemed as if he were inhaling unusually large quantities of air. Yet he swiftly recovered his composure, even if his unforgettable midnight eyes remained wary.

‘Hello, Miss Granger,’ he replied.

Hermione smiled, unable to keep herself from it, knowing her whole heart was on display, but unable to hide it away from him. ‘Are you here for business or pleasure?’ she asked inanely.

Fortunately, he did not appear to take exception to her question. He was watching her as if she were an exotic species of potions ingredient. ‘I have business on Level Nine,’ he said quietly.

The lift doors opened, and Hermione was desperately glad to see there was no one in the lift car. Professor Snape allowed Hermione to enter first, then followed her in. He chose his level, then raised an eyebrow at her.

‘Level Seven,’ she told him.

He snorted. ‘They put the Information Technology Group in with the Department of Magical Games and Sports?’ The he frowned and added, ‘You’re going the other way—you should have got on a different lift.’

Hermione smiled nervously, wishing the lift would stall or break down or something. ‘Level Seven had the most available space,’ she explained, ignoring his second comment. Dear God, they were stopping at Level Nine! ‘Sir, would you care to pop out for a bit of lunch, after your meeting?’

The lift doors opened, but he placed a hand on them to keep them open and turned to her. ‘I’m sorry to say my meeting is a lunch meeting,’ he explained.

Hermione knew her face was flaming red; she could feel it happening. She knew she was breaking all the rules about not going out on dates without permission, but the only thing that mattered to her
now was how desperately she did not want to see this man walking away from her.

‘Well, how about dinner?’ she asked, trying to sound bright and off-hand, and succeeding only in sounding lame. ‘My treat!’

He remained motionless for what seemed an eternity, save for his eyes. His glittering eyes were gazing into her own with such intensity that at any moment she expected to feel him in her mind, and she longed for it.

‘I’m afraid the Headmaster expects me back this afternoon—we’re administering the NEWTs this week, you know.’ He spoke smoothly, his voice pleasant and civil … but she was sure—positive!—that his eyes showed true regret.

‘I understand,’ she murmured, and she deferentially averted her eyes so that he would not read her desperate disappointment there. He’s rejecting the invitation, not you, she told herself, biting her lip hard. This isn’t the end of anything—it’s the beginning of you behaving like a woman behaves with a man she fancies.

‘Another time, perhaps?’

She looked up, surprised and delighted that he had not moved from his place in the lift doorway, determinedly holding it open, though a pleasant female voice had begun to intone, Please do not obstruct the doors. The lift cannot operate if the doors do not close completely.

He was holding up the lift, risking the silly bell alarm, waiting for her response—had stood there looking at the top of her head while he waited!

‘Yes, I’d like that,’ she said breathlessly, and he inclined his head politely for a moment before allowing the lift doors to creak slowly closed.

And Hermione leaned weakly against the lift wall, watching him striding down the corridor into the Department of Mysteries.

A/N: Hermione's NON WORK SAFE garments can be seen here:

http://community.livejournal.com/ftpma_dishing/46036.html#cutid1
That night, Hermione sat at the table in her small flat with her journal open before her. She knew she had to confess her transgression to Master Claudius, but she was having a bit of trouble focussing on that because she kept playing her encounter with Professor Snape over and again in her mind. He had been right there, close enough for her to smell his aftershave—close enough to touch!—and she still felt electrified by the exchange. Yes, she had blurted out her rather pathetic invitation with all the grace of a schoolgirl, but he had seemed unfazed by it. He had, in fact, taken the time to explain why he was declining her invitations, then had lingered long enough to say …

Another time, perhaps? She breathed the words aloud, and again, a shiver of delight went through her.

She had been wrong about him many times before—after all, wasn’t it his business to keep her off balance?—but there was new certainty in her, born of the hours Master Claudius had invested in earnest conversation with her and the further hours she had spent in quiet contemplation. This calm centre was possessed of the surety that his interest was true—sincere—and the knowledge buoyed her with a giddiness she could scarcely contain.

Nevertheless, it was her duty now to report back to Master Claudius what she had done. It would also be her obligation to submissively accept the punishment he meted out as gracefully as she could. With a slight frown of concentration, she applied herself to the business of writing about her day.

That night, she dreamed of Severus Snape more vividly than she had done in months.

Master Claudius responded to her entry, though it took longer than she had thought it might for him to do so. When his response appeared, Hermione read it with some perturbation.

We will discuss it when next we meet, his response read.

Hermione found her giddiness somewhat tempered now by concern over what her training Master would do or say to her.

Friday afternoon, Hermione entered the Claudius family rooms at Roissy House with mild trepidation. Vi met her with a gentle smile and a hug.

‘How are you?’ Vi asked, stepping back to look into Hermione’s face.

‘I’m well,’ Hermione assured her.

Vi nodded and released her shoulders. ‘Do you need the loo before you meet with Master?’

Hermione felt a flicker of unease. ‘No, thanks,’ she said.

Vi took the overnight bag from Hermione’s hand. ‘I’ll put this in your room,’ Vi said. ‘Go to the study. Master is waiting for you there.’
Without giving herself time to feel concerned, Hermione slipped through the door into Claudius’ study. He sat in an ornately carved chair at the far side of the room, facing her. He wore a high-necked black jumper, which provided a stark contrast to his silverying blond hair. He looked particularly solemn.

On the floor midway between them was a rectangular blue mat, not dissimilar from the ones Hermione remembered from the gymnasium of her grammar school.

‘Are you well, Hermione?’ Claudius inquired, his tone aloof and distant.

‘I am, sir, thank you,’ she replied.

‘Then you may kneel for me upon the mat,’ he said. ‘There will be no need to speak.’

Hermione advanced obediently to the mat and lowered herself to her knees, assuming the submissive’s pose. Her wristwatch showed the time as half-five.

She closed her eyes, inhaling slowly as she calmed her thoughts. It was not uncommon for her to kneel for Master Claudius, but before, he had always had her do it at his side, and never had he employed a mat.

When her wristwatch showed that ten minutes had passed without Master Claudius having spoken another word, Hermione realised she was experiencing either a test or a punishment. The realisation did not alarm her. She was serene, she was focussed, and she trusted Master Claudius implicitly. There was nothing to disturb her peace.

She resumed her slow, even breathing and allowed her consciousness to drift along. Time passed, and she was just beginning to note some physical discomfort when the door behind her opened. She resisted the urge to look over her shoulder, knowing such a thing would be improper, and then she smelled Vi’s delicate, floral perfume, and the other girl was bending over her.

‘Give me your hand and stand up,’ Vi instructed, and Hermione did as she was bid, relieved to change positions.

Master Claudius remained as he had been when she first entered the room, his cool grey eyes watching her steadily. Vi gently massaged her neck, her shoulders, and down each of her arms to her wrists. Next, Vi’s hands gripped Hermione’s waist, her fingers spanning down to rub the small of Hermione’s back. Moving ever downward, Vi knelt and reached beneath the hem of Hermione’s skirt to massage down one leg, then the other.

‘Do you need the loo?’ Vi asked softly, standing straight again and gently squeezing one of Hermione’s hands.

‘No, thank you,’ Hermione responded.

Vi placed her hands on Hermione’s shoulders, easing her down again. ‘Back in position, then,’ Vi said.

When Hermione resumed her position, she saw that her wristwatch reported the time now to be five minutes past six. Vi’s fingers then grasped the watchband.

‘I’ll keep that for you,’ Vi said. ‘It will go faster that way, I promise you.’

Hermione allowed the wristwatch to be removed without demur and drew a slow, deep breath. Clearly, this was going to go on for a while, though she didn’t know still if it were a punishment or a
Emptying her lungs of all air, she felt a smile curl her lips upward. It didn’t really matter, did it? She didn’t have to be concerned with why; all she had to do was obey, and there was a freedom in that lack of responsibility that she had only ever encountered in D/s.

Her muscles and joints had been uncomfortable for a few minutes when next Vi helped her rise to her feet. Still, Master Claudius watched her from his place across the room, and it seemed to Hermione that he had remained as unmoving as she had done. Briefly, she wondered if his bum were becoming sore and numb, as were her legs.

This time, after gently rubbing Hermione’s sore spots, Vi led her to the door and back again to the mat, as if to exercise her legs. As they walked, and Hermione felt the sensation tingling through her limbs like shooting electricity, she glanced at the clock over the mantelpiece and saw it was just past half-six.

_They’re having me change position every thirty minutes_, she noted.

‘Do you need the loo?’ Vi asked.

Hermione declined, and Vi assisted her to her knees. She was unaware of Vi’s retreat this time; she was too occupied with her dilemma. Already, her knees were uncomfortable, and her hips objected to the position, as well. But she was determined that she would endure the minor discomfort, for it was Master Claudius’ will that she do so.

Concentrating on her desire to please him, she began the calming ritual of the deep breaths, releasing the reality of the moment with each exhalation, willing herself up, out of her physical body and into the welcoming warmth of sub-space. Ah, yes! _Here_ was where she wanted to be, where she had spent the most compelling moments of her life, and she allowed herself to remember that as she floated happily along.

She was surprised when next Vi helped her to her feet, and she stumbled, her hands closing about Vi’s upper arms to steady herself.

‘Are you well, Hermione?’ Master Claudius inquired, just as he had done before she first knelt on the mat.

Hermione answered promptly, ‘I am well, sir, thank you.’

Claudius nodded once, a tiny show of approbation, and Vi began the now familiar routine of massaging Hermione’s muscles.

‘I think I need the loo,’ Hermione said quietly, pitching her voice for Vi’s ears only.

‘Come along, then,’ Vi said, wrapping a supportive arm about Hermione’s waist and walking with her to the door which led to Master Claudius’ personal bathroom.

Hermione crossed the threshold and reached to shut the door, but Vi shook her head and propelled Hermione gently to the toilet.

‘Sit,’ Vi said sweetly.

Hermione bit her lip and looked through the door, where she could see Master Claudius, his face turned to watch them, his expression unchanged. ‘Can’t we close the door?’ she asked.

‘We do not close doors on Master in his study,’ Vi said firmly, beginning to lift Hermione’s skirt hem.
‘I’ll do it,’ Hermione said hastily, lifting the back of her skirt just enough to sit on the toilet seat. ‘Can you stay in front of me?’ she asked in a small voice. She was trying so hard to be accepting and obedient—Claudius and Vi had already given her so much!—but the lack of privacy was extremely difficult for her to endure.

‘Of course,’ Vi said, and true to her word, she remained between Hermione and the doorway. After a moment during which nothing happened, Vi leaned over to twist the tap. The water splashed into the basin, and Hermione was able to let loose a stream of urine, bringing a smile to Vi’s lips. ‘That wasn’t so bad,’ Vi murmured, taking the toilet tissue in hand and bending as if she meant to wipe Hermione dry.

‘I’ll do it,’ Hermione said again, and Vi surrendered the tissue with a knowing smile.

The mantel clock proclaimed the time as ten minutes after seven when Hermione knelt again on the mat, and she was extremely pleased to note the ease with which she settled into sub-space this time. In this most submissive of postures, she was surprised to note how remarkably empowered she felt. The next thirty minutes passed as a whisper of time, and then large hands gripped her elbows, and the distinctive scent of Master Claudius’ cologne filled her nostrils.

‘Up you get,’ he said quietly, lifting her completely off her feet and depositing her on the sofa. She lay supine, and he knelt beside her, massaging her calves with his strong, sure fingers. ‘You did well,’ he said, his eyes looking into hers. ‘I am very pleased, Hermione.’

She flushed and smiled. ‘I’m glad, sir.’

He stood. ‘Do you feel steady enough to walk to your chair?’

‘I’m fine,’ she averred, and she stood and crossed to her usual wingchair.

He turned its mate to face her and sat down. ‘Do you feel your training with us is complete?’ he asked her abruptly.

Hermione blinked, taken aback. ‘Why do you ask, sir?’

He leaned forward, his brow furrowed. ‘Because you took a serious step this week without thought of consulting me, which speaks of one of two things. Either you are a thoughtless trainee in need of more severe supervision and discipline, or you are near the end of your training and eager to find your Master.’

Hermione’s lips parted; she was profoundly struck by his words. ‘I ... I hadn’t thought about it that way, sir.’

Claudius nodded. ‘I know you haven’t,’ he agreed. ‘I think much too highly of you and of your progress in these last three months to believe you thoughtless or in need of more severe discipline, Hermione. I believe you are the latter girl—the one near the end of her training who is ready to find her Master.’

Hermione felt her heart lifting, the residual bliss of the sub-space visit sweetening her mood. ‘Am I really?’ she said, leaning forward, too.

He nodded and took her hands. ‘Yes, you’ve done very well. This is my plan: You’ll complete your period of abstinence, as we agreed previously, and at the next party weekend, you’ll make your debut. I will put you on display at the Dungeon party, after which your training will officially end. At that time, Dominants may approach me in regards to you—and you may choose the Dominant with whom you will play that night, from amongst those who wish to participate. You may choose one, or
as many as you like, for your first night out of training. It's all about you, that night.’ He smiled, and Hermione saw a bit of wickedness in him—a streak of playful sexuality that drew an answering smile from her. ‘You’ll have to ask Violet about the night she finished her training.’

Something he had said repeated in her mind, and Hermione licked her lips nervously. ‘Sir, what does it mean, to be “put on display”?’

‘You know that at the next Dungeon party, you will appear naked,’ he began, and Hermione nodded her agreement. ‘You will be escorted directly to the Dungeon, usually by your Training Dominant and those of your sisters whom you wish to have by you for moral support. In the Dungeon, there will be an elevated square pedestal in place, which can be approached by steps up each of its four sides. You will kneel on the pedestal, which rotates slowly around, and remain there, on display to everyone in attendance, for roughly two hours.’

Hermione could not prevent the gasp of dismay she uttered.

Claudius smiled and released one of her hands to lightly stroke her cheek. ‘You will handle it like the serene, centred submissive you have become,’ he assured her. ‘You will cope exactly as you have done tonight, and your sisters will attend to you periodically, just as Violet did. And just think, petite—when the period of your display is at an end, you will be free to play with the Dominants of your choice. Those Dominants with a serious interest in you will be free to approach me with their inquiries about becoming your Master.’

Hermione felt a queer sense of unreality. She had come here today expecting to be chastised and perhaps even punished, but instead, she felt as if she were being praised and rewarded, even if her reward seemed a touch anxiety-producing.

‘I thought you would be angry with me for asking Professor Snape out on a date,’ she admitted.

Claudius nodded. ‘And had it been any other man you had asked out, I would have been unhappy with your behaviour. But you have opened yourself to me, Hermione. I know the place Master Severus occupies in your heart and in your hopes. It would be unreasonable in the extreme for me to expect you to pass up such an opportunity to connect with the man you love. From this time forward, I have no rules for you where he is concerned, save for the two orgasms a week restriction. If you have the opportunity, you may do as you will with Master Severus, providing you do not exceed your orgasm limit for the week.’

Hermione didn’t know she was going to do it until she lunged impetuously at Claudius and clasped her arms about his neck. He accepted her embrace, pulling her gently into his lap, where she perched, her face pressed to his neck.

‘You’re so good—so kind!’ she cried, tears of thankfulness wet against his skin.

He rocked her comfortingly. ‘My objective is to see you in a life of happy submission, Hermione, not to exert my control and authority for the sake of my ego.’ With the tips of his fingers, he moved the escaped unruly strands of brown hair from her tear-damp cheeks and looked into her eyes. ‘I told you in the beginning that I could not promise you a successful outcome with Master Severus. That is still true. I do not know his plans where you are concerned. But Hermione, please know that if things do not work out for you with him, Violet and I would be honoured to have you here, as part of our family.’

Hermione looked up into the handsome, sober face of the man who had given her so very much of himself, and she felt her heart turn over in her chest.
‘I know you would come to us as a second choice, at best, but I do not despair of being able to make you happy, given time and opportunity.’ He smiled, a crooked, tender smile which exposed the first crack of vulnerability Hermione had ever seen in his smooth facade. ‘Violet and I care for you deeply, petite, and we know you are fond of us. We’ve never offered another trainee a place with us before. You would make us very happy if you made your offer of submission to me.’

Hermione continued to gaze, dumbfounded, into the grey eyes of the man—the loving, giving Dominant—in whose arms she was cradled. A vision of herself, in bed between Claudius and Vi, receiving the attention of both of them, curled through her lower abdomen with the warmth of low-burning coals, and she became acutely aware of the breadth of his chest, the strength of his arms, and the hardening length of him beneath her bum. She ached with want, but she realised it was not desire for this man as much as it was desire for a touch other than her own. She felt an obligation to Master Claudius, but her whole being ached for Severus Snape.

‘Thank you, sir,’ she said, lifting her face to kiss his cheek. ‘I won’t forget what you’ve said.’

He smiled again and assisted her to rise to her feet. ‘Good girl,’ he said. ‘We’ll discuss your debut more tomorrow. Now, go wash up for dinner. I don’t know about you, but I’m very hungry.’

It was two weeks before she saw Professor Snape again. She was a bit late leaving her office one afternoon, and as she entered the ministry Atrium, he was at the other end, queuing before the exit Floos. She hurried as fast as she could across the vast Atrium to reach him, but she arrived at the gilded fireplace after he had climbed into it. As she stared into his face, the Floo Powder hit the flames, turning them bright green, and his eyes locked with hers just before he spun away.

Her knees felt weak from mere eye contact, and she wished she had arrived soon enough to hear him name his destination. Then, she could have followed him...

Not, of course, that she would have followed him home, uninvited.

Would she?

She wondered why he had been at the Ministry and where he was staying, now that the summer hols had begun. Roissy House? Hogwarts?

But most importantly, she wondered if he would be present at the next party weekend, when she would make her debut and be placed on display. What if he did not attend? What if she was there without him when her display period was over and she was supposed to choose a Dominant to play with? Could she decline the playing and think of another way to reach her former Master? She pondered these questions often, then calmed and centred herself as Master Claudius had taught her to do, seeking and finding the balance that permitted her to endure the wait until the July party weekend with grace.

There was a large tearoom at the Ministry of Magic, where the employees could spend their lunch and tea breaks. There were pots of tea and coffee available at no charge, and cakes, tarts, and other simple fare available for purchase for those who did not bring their own food.

Hermione invariably spent her lunch breaks in the tearoom with a sandwich, a cup of tea, and a book. Tom and Patty, her co-workers, occasionally persuaded her to set her book aside and chat, but most often, she sat alone with her book and her thoughts.

It was on a Friday in mid-July when she was stirred from her solitary meal by a familiar voice.
‘May I join you?’

Hermione jerked her head up and saw Severus Snape standing across the table from her, a tray bearing a cup of tea and a slice of shepherd’s pie in his hands. His hair had been trimmed since last she had seen him, just brushing his shoulders, now. He wore new robes, black with a faint chalky pin-stripe, over a smart new severely tailored black coat. His boots were buffed to a mirror shine beneath the faultless crease of his black trousers.

‘Miss Granger?’

Her eyes rose to his, which were gleaming with something perilously akin to mockery.

‘Please,’ she said, pulling her book and teacup closer, as if to make room for him.

He settled across from her, and she watched him without breathing, fearful that the least movement on her part would dispel the solidity of the wizard across from her into a mist of smoke. He took up his fork and glanced at her again.

‘I trust you’ve been well?’ he said neutrally. ‘You certainly appear well.’ He took a bite of his food.

‘Yes, very well—thank you, sir,’ she answered, pleased that she sounded as she normally did, rather than as excited as she felt. ‘And you? Have you been well?’

He sipped from his teacup. ‘Quite, thank you,’ he answered. He took another bite of shepherd’s pie, and when he had swallowed it, he wiped his mouth and spoke again. ‘Your work is progressing, I see, if the Prophet can be believed.’

Hermione nodded. ‘Yes, we’re pleased with the first stage of integration. There have been some bugs, but that’s only to be expected.’

He quirked an eyebrow. ‘What an imprecise field is your Information Technology,’ he said, his tone bearing a trace of a taunt. ‘I am surprised you are able to adapt to such an inexact science—after all, how is a know-it-all meant to function in a world where “bugs” are permitted to exist?’

Hermione found herself watching and listening to him in a way she had been unable to achieve before her formal submissive training. Breathing with deliberate slowness, feeling her centre beneath her like a steadying foundation, she was able to recognise his mockery as a ploy to unsettle her. Focussing on her serenity, she responded to his remark with a tranquil smile.

‘What sort of challenge is to be found in a subject where all of the questions have already been answered?’ she replied lightly, darting a glance at him from beneath her lashes. After all, where was it written than a serene woman must not be flirtatious?

She was rewarded by the way his black gaze settled on her face, his expression arrested. She lowered her eyes to the table surface and watched the slow deliberation with which he replaced his cup in its saucer.

‘Indeed,’ he said, and a thrill of possibility rippled wildly down her spine, drawing an involuntary, breathy exhalation from her. Feeling as if a cage full of butterflies had been set loose in her stomach, she raised her face to his and their eyes locked.

‘Indeed,’ he said again, drawing the word out in his low-pitched, silky voice, as if he were answering her look rather than her statement.

And as if guided by an otherworldly spirit, Hermione rose from her seat, knowing beyond a shadow
of a doubt that the wisest course now was to walk away, leaving him wondering ... and, Circe willing, wanting ... more.

‘Enjoy your lunch, sir,’ she said.

As if responding to a lesson too deeply ingrained to resist, the professor stood as well. Smiling radiantly up into his flabbergasted face, Hermione dropped the merest ghost of a curtsy and left him alone with his tea and shepherd’s pie.

That weekend at Roissy House passed much as the last two had done, with Hermione practicing her ‘display’ routine each day, complete with Vi’s ministrations and Master Claudius’ intent, expressionless eyes upon her for the entire time. In her long stretches of immobile inactivity, she reflected that though he had done nothing to cross the line she had drawn between psychological and sexual Domination at the beginning of her training with him, the charming, handsome man appeared more frequently, now, and Hermione could easily see how a woman could come to love him.

‘Hermione?’ Vi said that Sunday morning as the two girls sat in the Roissy House nursery, Vi with Marcus at her breast and Hermione knitting little green booties.

‘Hmm?’ Hermione responded, her head bent over her knitting.

‘Did Master speak to you about coming to live with us?’

Hermione heard the tentative, almost shy tone in Vi’s voice, and she gave the other girl her full attention. ‘Yes, he did,’ she answered carefully.

Vi smiled at her. ‘I just wanted you to know that I would be very happy if you offered your submission to him—oh, only if things didn’t work out with Master Severus, of course.’

Hermione nodded gravely. ‘I can’t tell you how touched I was when he told me,’ she said honestly. ‘I had always thought he mostly disapproved of me.’

Vi shifted Marcus onto her shoulder and began to pat his back. ‘Oh, he did,’ she said softly, ‘but it’s because he has no use for politics, and he didn’t understand your involvement in the Order of the Phoenix. Now that the war’s over, and he knows you better, it all makes more sense to him. He admires all you did to bring down You-Know-Who.’

Hermione bit her lip. ‘The thing I don’t understand, Vi, is how you can bear to share him.’

Vi laughed softly. ‘I knew when I offered myself to him that Master Claudius prefers to have two submissives,’ she said. ‘He had two submissives when I first met him, but one decided to get married and moved away to Derbyshire, and the other asked for her release soon afterwards, because she, too, wanted to marry and have a family. At that time, you see, Master had no desire for those things.’

Hermione watched Vi’s pretty face, amazed that her friend could remain so serene while discussing her predecessors. ‘How long have you been with him?’ she asked.

‘Six years,’ Vi said. ‘We’ve trained a fair few submissives in that time, but I’ve never found another girl I would want to share our lives. You see, I trust you, Hermione. I trust you not to try to exclude me.’

‘Oh, no!’ Hermione said, surprised. ‘No one could exclude you—he loves you too much.’

‘I know he does,’ Vi agreed, settling the sleeping Marcus in his cot. ‘And I know that you love
Master Severus,’ she added, turning to look down at Hermione. ‘But I wanted you to know that I agree with the offer Master made to you. It would make me happy for you to come to complete our family.’

Hermione set her knitting aside and stood to embrace Vi. ‘Thank you,’ she murmured into the soft blond hair of her friend. ‘I don’t know what I’ve done to deserve so much kindness.’

And they stood together in the nursery, giving and taking comfort from one another.

The Tuesday morning before the July party weekend, Hermione was late to work. The Atrium was strangely deserted as she hurried across the floor. She had overslept and was in a mad rush as she dashed into the lift and punched the button for the seventh level. Small lavender paper airplanes fluttered about above her head as she jabbed impatiently at the button and pulled her compact from her handbag, distractedly applying the lipstick she had had no time to put on before she left her flat. She was therefore otherwise occupied when the lift doors finally began to close, only to be stopped at the last moment by an imperative hand and pushed resolutely open to allow another person to enter the lift.

‘I was in a hurry!’ she snapped crossly, snapping closed her compact at the same time. ‘Couldn’t you have waited?’ She shoved the plastic case into her bag and turned to face the interloper.

‘Why should I wait?’

Severus Snape stared down into her face, his expression unreadable, and as the lift shuddered into motion, he insolently held her gaze and reached without looking to press the button to stop the lift between floors.

‘What are you doing?’ Hermione demanded, her heart slamming about in her chest as if it had been somehow dislocated, her breath coming in gasping pants.

He did not answer but stepped closer, moving into her personal space, driving her to retreat, which she did, until she felt the lift wall at her back. Still, he crowded closer, until they almost touched, and Hermione pushed the back of her head against the cool metal wall of the lift, watching him in shock and awe. How did he dare to press her so?

He stared at her with black eyes so dark that the iris was indistinguishable from the pupil. The scent of his aftershave permeated her senses, flooding her mind with memories and her body with arousal, until she felt her nipples crinkle against the cotton of her bra as heat pooled in her lower abdomen. Then he moved his face closer, as if he would kiss her mouth, and her lips parted in anticipation.

‘Where are you hurrying off to?’ he murmured, the peppermint of his toothpaste puffing across her face as his eyes lazily travelled her features.

‘W-work,’ she managed, and one long-fingered hand rose, and the tips of his fingers ghosted along her cheek.

‘Still so soft,’ he said quietly, and Hermione thrilled to the sheer want in his voice, so clear and acute that she felt it like a blow to her midriff, impeding her breathing. ‘What are you doing out, wandering about, hmm?’ he asked, the same fingertips now stroking up her throat. ‘Shouldn’t you be—’ chained to a bed somewhere? his eyes plainly said ‘otherwise occupied?’

Her lips parted again to answer him, her tongue darting out to moisten her lips, and this drew from him a groaning sigh. The hand at her throat cupped her chin as the pad of his thumb traced her lower lip, then dipped inside to run over her saliva-slick inner lip, a sensation not unlike the feel of his
finger teasing the desire-slick lip of her inner labia.

Her quim ached for him.

‘You like this, don’t you?’ he asked, his voice pitched for her ears alone, his eyes like inky pools in whose depths she could easily, willingly drown. ‘You like it when I put you against the wall and whisper filthy things in your ear.’

The stroking of his thumb, back and forth across her inner lower lip, was both arousing and hypnotic; she could not vocalise an answer, but she gave a minute nod of her head, taking care not to disrupt his thumb.

‘This reminds me of touching you … elsewhere,’ he breathed, softly emphasising the last word, and Hermione moaned in her throat, as if he had, indeed, rubbed her clitoris. He smiled a predatory smile, his eyes glittering wickedly in the weak light of the oil lamps. ‘I wonder what the filthy girl is wearing beneath her oh-so-proper skirt?’ he mused, and then his thumb dipped deeper, past the barrier of her lower teeth, to touch her tongue.

Hermione could not help herself. Her lips closed hungrily about the invading thumb and her eyes closed and she suckled, laving the digit with her tongue, wishing it were his cock instead.

‘That’s right,’ he breathed, moving his thumb slowly back and forth between her lips. ‘Suck it.’

She continued the suckling and the slight bobbing her of head, completely unconscious of the vague movement of her hips, in time with her head, her deprived quim in search of something to rub against.

‘I wonder what you’re thinking about, little slut,’ he mused, his voice between a taunt and a caress. Then he abruptly removed his thumb, and she opened her mouth to protest, her eyes opening as well.

‘Wha—’ she began, but he stepped back from her then, and she swayed forward, as if in protest.

‘Let’s see what’s under the skirt,’ he said again, as if it were the most reasonable request imaginable, and feeling somewhat dazed, Hermione allowed her handbag to drop to the floor and grasped the fabric of her skirt in both hands. ‘That’s right,’ he purred, his black eyes moving from her hands to her face and back again, as the lift alarm bell began to ring.

Hermione’s eyes opened wide, and it dawned on her that she was preparing to flash her former professor in a Ministry of Magic lift.

‘Don’t stop now, filthy girl,’ he said caressingly. ‘It will take them ten minutes to get the doors open—plenty of time for you to show me what you want me to see—and you do want it, don’t you, Hermione?’

She swallowed, the anxiety-producing alarm raising the stakes in this game, increasing her heart rate as well as her desire, slicking both the palms of her hands and the swollen lips of her cunt. ‘Yes,’ she whispered, inching the skirt up until her tights and her plain white cotton knickers were clearly visible.

‘What?’ he said, his eyes flicking from her crotch to her face. ‘No stockings and suspenders? What an odd little slut you are, wearing these schoolgirl things.’

Hermione bit her lip to keep from saying what she was thinking, not wanting to interrupt his train of thought. How many seconds had passed since the bell began to ring? Would she be caught in this compromising, humiliating position by fellow Ministry workers? Oh, she wanted him to stop talking
and do something!

He stepped closer again, his eyelids at half-mast, his voice barely above a whisper. He bent his head, his black hair swinging forward to caress the side of her face as he spoke into her ear. ‘What do you want, filthy girl?’ he asked, and even more than before, his familiar, beloved voice caressed the degrading name. ‘Do you want to—’ his lips ghosted over the shell of her ear, sending an audible shudder down her body ‘—come for me?’

She gasped, her hands reaching to clutch him, but he easily captured her wrists and stretched her arms above her head.

‘Do you want it?’ he hissed. ‘Time is running out, girl!’

‘Yes!’ she cried, and he released her wrists, simultaneously stepping back.

‘Pull down your tights and your knickers and let me see you,’ he said, and as she frantically tucked the front of her skirt in its waistband, as she had done so many times in his study at Hogwarts, he squatted before her, his face on level with her quim. ‘Faster!’ he urged.

In a fever of want, she grabbed her underthings and yanked them down furiously, inadvertently tearing a hole in the tights. As she bent, her face was close to the top of his head, and for a second, his eyes left her naked quim to look in her eyes. Then she was upright again, quivering in her frantic need, with the alarm bell ringing and ringing, seeming to grow louder. For an endless time, he inspected her nether parts, then he was standing, crowding her again against the wall.

‘I can smell your wet cunt, you filthy girl,’ he hissed, pressing a leg against her needy crotch. ‘You want me to push you up against the wall and say filthy things and make you come, don’t you? Don’t you?’

Hermione humped against his leg. ‘Please!’ she moaned. ‘Please!’

‘Do it,’ he said inexorably, taking her hand and forcing it between their bodies so that it passed over the iron rod of his erection until her fingers touched her labia. ‘Finger yourself. Come for me.’

‘Touch me!’ she begged, reaching for him with her free hand, but he caught that hand in an iron grasp.

‘Touch yourself,’ he reiterated, and the thumb she had sucked like a cock touched her lips again.

Her lips parted, and he ran the pad of his thumb along her wet inner lip. Desperately, she touched her clitoris, and a guttural sound escaped her.

‘Good girl,’ he breathed, pinning the hand he held over her head as he slid his finger along the wetness in her mouth. ‘I’ll finger your mouth, and you finger your clit—I want you to come for me, Hermione.’

Her head sagged back against the wall as she wriggled her fingers deeper into her slit, gathering the pool of lubrication her body had made in anticipation of receiving his thick cock—More fool you, stupid cunt! she thought wildly—and spreading the slickness up, rolling her nubbin beneath her fingertips, her eyes glazed with desire.

‘Yes,’ he said, watching her face, his eyes burning and insistent, as was his voice. ‘Imagine my thumb is my tongue and your mouth is your cunt—and come for me.’

She rubbed herself in a circular motion, the heel of her hand pressed hard against her pelvic bone as
her hips jerked and her fingers danced on her clitoris. Gazing helplessly into his rapacious face, she felt herself falling, falling for him, though she remained in place, masturbating in a public lift at his command.

‘Filthy, dirty, beautiful girl,’ he crooned, and his thumb and index finger were sucked into her greedy mouth, her tongue engaged in an orgy of caresses with the teasing, grasping digits. ‘They’re outside, Hermione—do you hear them?’ he whispered, his breath hot on her ear. ‘They’re going to pry the doors open and find you here with your knickers at your knees and your fingers buried in your hot little cunt. Do you think they’ll pull out their cocks and wank while they watch you?’

Lost to all reality, she moaned as she writhed, her eyes closed, her entire being wrapped up in the stimulus of him, his eyes, his voice, his fingers, and she pleasured herself shamelessly.

‘No more malingering, little slut,’ he said. ‘Do as I command you, Hermione—come for me now!’

And the tip of his tongue flicked into her ear as he pressed his leg roughly against her busy hand. An explosion of light strobed behind her closed eyes as she orgasmed, an unuttered cry trapped in her throat by the fingers receiving a fucking from her tongue.

‘Good girl,’ he said, releasing her wrist and encircling her with his free arm as the aftershocks shuddered through her body. ‘Filthy, nasty, dirty girl,’ he said, retrieving his fingers from her mouth and pressing her face, now streaked with tears, against his scratchy wool coat. ‘I’ll get you out! Don’t panic!’

The voice shouted from a distance, and the lift began to creak and shake protestingly.

‘Here—allow me.’

Hermione opened her eyes, dimly aware of her location and her state of dishabille, watching in some bemusement as her former Master tenderly drew her fingers from her quim and placed them in his mouth, his eyes closing in a near-orgasmic expression as he sucked her secretions from them. Then the lift began to rise, and he was on his knees.

‘These are clearly unnecessary,’ he said, magically removing her knickers and tucking them away in his pocket. Then he deftly pulled her tights up and smoothed her skirt down. He pressed her handbag into the hand still wet from her juices and his saliva and turned away from her just as the lift doors slid open.

‘Are you all right, sir, ma’am?’ asked the pimply young man wearing the navy blue robes of the Magical Maintenance team. ‘I don’t know why the lift stalled—terribly sorry for the inconvenience!’

Severus Snape drew himself up to his full height and glared down at the hapless young man. ‘See that it doesn’t happen again, Hopkins,’ he snapped, exiting the lift and striding impatiently down the corridor without a backward glance.

The young man, whose ruddy face Hermione recognised from Hogwarts—hadn’t he been in Hufflepuff?—stared at the departing wizard with his mouth agape. ‘I say—was that Professor Snape?’

Hermione wiped her mouth with the back of her hand, noting that it still smelled of her cunt, even after he had sucked her fingers greedily in his mouth. ‘Yes, it certainly was,’ she agreed. And walking past Hopkins, she trudged to the stairwell, as if unwilling to risk the lift again.

In truth, she needed the time to savour the experience. When she finally arrived at her office, she
glanced at the little ormolu clock on her desk, realising her entire episode in the lift with the professor had taken less than fifteen minutes.
Chapter 81

For the Potions Master’s Amusement

Chapter 81: Dancing

The rest of that day passed in a pleasurable haze, with frequent mind-wandering excursions into the memory of her adventure in the lift. By the time she left work, watching avidly for the professor—what was he doing spending so much time at the Ministry, anyway?—she was already worrying away at when she would see him again and how that meeting would go. Did his actions mean that he was interested in her again? That he wanted her … for his own? The he would be present at her debut?

She made a full account of the encounter in her journal that night for Master Claudius’ perusal, and wrote a separate account to Vi, her submissive mentor, sending that letter by owl. She vowed to herself that she would check everything that happened between her and Severus Snape with her mentor this time around, until Vi herself said it was no longer necessary.

Please, Circe—let there be a next time! she prayed.

The next morning, she was on high alert as she entered the Ministry Atrium. But try as she might, roaming the corridors and sitting in the tearoom long past her allotted lunch time, she did not catch sight of him that day. That evening, reading Vi’s response, she smiled at her friend’s excitement on her behalf to have enjoyed such an unexpected encounter, but as she tried to sleep, her inner demons rose up. What if he had some other reason for accosting her in the lift—some reason not related to his desire to be with her again? Sleep eluded her as she tossed and turned, and at last, she climbed out of bed and assumed the submissive’s pose, using the skills she had been taught to calm and soothe her mind.

At last, she slept.

Thursday passed much as Wednesday had done, with no sight of her quarry. Leaving for home after work that day, she saw a lone, dark figure standing in the middle of the concourse of the Ministry Atrium, the tide of exiting workers breaking around him like the waves crashing past a rock jutting from the ocean depths. Hermione’s pulse quickened as did her step, and she walked toward him with rising excitement. Now she could see the monochromatic clothing, now she could discern the austere countenance—now, the piercing black eyes. Using all her self-discipline to prevent herself from running, she hurried forward, seeing the way his hooded eyes swept insolently down her body, as if he were seeing her naked … in chains. Her mouth was inexplicably dry, and now she was within hailing distance—but he, ever perplexing, turned on his heel and slipped into the Floo, cutting ahead of the waiting queue and disappearing in a blaze of bright green flames.

‘Can you believe the nerve of that bloke?’ one young man said angrily. ‘Thinks he’s too good to queue up with the rest of us?’

‘Didn’t you recognise him?’ his companion said, a podgy witch with a worshipful look on her face. ‘That was Professor Severus Snape!’

‘Oh,’ the young man said, unconsciously straightening his robes. ‘That explains it, then.’

Hermione could only agree.
Friday afternoon, it was sheer relief to curl up next to Vi and Marcus on the sofa in the sitting room and pour out her heart.

‘But what does it mean?’ she whinged, worrying at her lower lip.

Vi smiled at her. ‘You know him far better than I,’ she chided gently. ‘What do you think it means?’

Hermione sighed. ‘If he weren’t interested in me, why would he bother doing all he’s done? If he just … just wanted to be friends, he wouldn’t have played with me in the lift, right?’

Vi leaned over, placing baby Marcus in Hermione’s arms, then stood. ‘It seems highly unlikely that he would pay you so much attention if he weren’t interested in you,’ she said. ‘I know it’s hard to wait, but if you will only be patient, I’m sure you’ll know more tonight. Now, I’m going to take my shower, and then it will be your turn.’

‘But what if he isn’t here tonight?’ Hermione said softly to the sleeping baby, watching his lips twitch as he dreamed of his mama.

‘What if who isn’t here tonight?’ Master Claudius inquired, strolling into the room. He had been out when Hermione had first arrived, and he had entered so quietly she had not heard him. ‘No, don’t get up—I like seeing you there, cradling my son against your breast.’

Hermione flushed, feeling as if the words had been somehow quite intimate, but her Training Dominant smiled at her without a trace of guile.

‘Hello, sir,’ Hermione said quietly. ‘Do you know if Professor Snape will be in attendance this weekend?’

Claudius seated himself beside her, leaving a comfortable distance between them. ‘I have not been taken into his confidence regarding his plans,’ he said. ‘Master Severus has been somewhat less communicative with me, of late.’

Hermione frowned, though an irrational flame of hope leapt in her. ‘Why would that be?’ she asked.

Claudius only shook his head. ‘It would be fruitless for us to speculate,’ he said, and Hermione knew it would certainly be fruitless for her to persist. ‘Do you have any questions for me, going into your debut weekend, before I give you your instructions?’

‘Will there be rules for me tonight?’ she asked curiously.

Claudius rested an arm along the sofa behind her and turned a bit to face her. ‘No orgasms for you until after your presentation tomorrow night—this instruction includes Master Severus, should he be in attendance tonight. You may dance with whomever you will, but you are not to engage in any play or sexual activity.’

Hermione considered this. ‘Does that include kissing?’

Claudius cocked his head a bit to the side. ‘What an interesting question,’ he said, contemplating. ‘No, I don’t think it does include kissing. You may accept kisses, but nothing beyond that. No sexual touching.’

The baby stirred, turning his face against Hermione’s chest and nuzzling about, searching for a nipple. She shifted him upward, so that his cheek lay against her shoulder, and she gently rocked him until he settled down again, just as she had seen Vi do with him.
‘Would you like to have a baby, Hermione?’ Claudius murmured.

She looked directly into the intent, questioning grey eyes. ‘One day, perhaps,’ she said. ‘Not at this point in my life, though. I’m not nearly ready to think about being a mother.’

Claudius nodded his head and reached for Marcus. ‘Let me take him,’ he said. ‘You’ll want to be preparing for tonight, I suspect.’

And surrendering the sleeping baby to his father’s arms, she slipped away to do just that.

She was as anxious as if she were about to go on stage to perform in a play.

She stood in the room allotted for her in the Claudius home, gazing at her reflection in the mirror. She was dressed and made-up for the dinner and dancing party, but she felt unaccountably nervous. She wore the daring red satin dress Severus had bought for her the year before at Valentine’s Day, its deep vee décolletage plunging to the waist of the frock, the edges of the neckline held together by the gossamer filaments of fine silver chains. Beneath the dress, she was bare, save for the stay-up stockings she wore. She had permission to wear her hair down, and she had taken care to smooth its unruliness with Sleekeazy directly from the shower, patiently coaxing corkscrew curls to form. She knew she looked good, and if she had not been thinking about the likely whereabouts of Severus Snape, she would undoubtedly have been a happy girl now.

‘Come along, petite.’

Hermione turned from the mirror and obediently followed Claudius to the sitting room, where Vi awaited them, resplendent in a pale grey sheathe.

‘You’re beautiful,’ Vi said, coming forward to press her cheek briefly to Hermione’s, careful not to smudge her make-up.

‘So are you,’ Hermione said honestly.

‘We have a little gift for you, to celebrate the end of your training,’ Claudius said, removing a square black leather box from the pocket of his Muggle suit coat. ‘Since you will be naked tomorrow night, I wanted you to have it to wear tonight.’

Batting away the thought of naked tomorrow night, Hermione accepted the jeweller’s box and snapped open the lid. Sparkling against the white satin interior there nestled a silver bangle bracelet inlaid with bright red rubies. It was beautiful, and Hermione couldn’t suppress the gasp of awe when she saw it, but there was also a part of her that desperately hoped they weren’t real rubies.

‘It’s too much,’ she protested weakly as Claudius removed the bracelet from its box and took her hand to fit the bangle about her wrist.

‘Nonsense,’ he said gruffly, pressing a kiss to her forehead.

‘Let’s go,’ Vi said, taking Hermione’s hand in her own, and when she did, Hermione could not help remarking that Vi wore an identical bracelet, inlaid with what appeared to be diamonds.

Kell and t swarmed Hermione when they saw her in the downstairs entry hall, where many guests milled about, chatting.

‘Have you seen him?’ Hermione whispered to Kell, accepting her hug and taking the opportunity to
look over her shoulder.

‘Not yet,’ Kell admitted.

‘Is he here?’ Hermione demanded of t before being enveloped in a loving hug.

‘I haven’t seen him,’ t said.

‘But is he here?’ Hermione persisted. ‘Doesn’t Rafe know?’

Taffy cast a frustrated look at her husband, who was in conversation with two members of the Roissy House Board of Directors. ‘He told me to mind my own business and not to interfere,’ she said glumly.

Hermione wanted to scream in vexation. Why wouldn’t anyone tell her?

Vi glided up to them, exchanging cheek kisses with Kell and t and wrapping an arm about Hermione’s waist. ‘As your mentor, I feel obliged to say that you seem to be … overwrought,’ Vi said calmly, leading Hermione away from the others into a quiet corner as the guests began to file into the formal dining room. ‘You’re not centred, are you?’

Hermione closed her eyes and drew a shaking breath. ‘No, I’m not,’ she admitted. ‘I can’t seem to focus.’

‘You don’t want to see him in this state,’ Vi counselled softly. ‘He will do something to overset you—he always does, from what you’ve told me—and you will be betrayed into behaving in the old way, rather than the new way you’ve learned.’ Vi’s hand stroked soothingly up and down the back of Hermione’s dress. ‘I don’t want to see that happen, after all the work you’ve done, dearest.’

Hermione opened her eyes, hearing the tender concern in Vi’s voice and believing in it. ‘You’re right,’ she agreed. ‘I’m a mess.’

Vi slipped with her into an alcove with a loveseat. ‘Let’s sit here for a few moments and practice our centring exercises,’ she said serenely and promptly closed her eyes and rested her hands upon her thighs as if she were in the submissive’s pose. Feeling a slight twinge of unreality, Hermione followed suit, beginning her calming ritual as if she were in her own room, kneeling on the bedside rug that had been placed there for just this purpose. She began with slow, deep breathing and progressed from there, finding that her centre had not deserted her—instead, she had simply failed to seek it out before she left her room, and in that agitated state, she had been at the mercy of her emotions. As she focussed, she felt her breathing slow in conjunction with her heart rate, and as she calmed, serenity flowed into her mind and her body. What did it matter what actions someone else chose to take? All that truly mattered was that she find and retain herself, regardless of what those around her chose to do.

‘I’m ready now,’ she said soberly, opening her eyes and twisting slightly from side to side to release the tension in her back and shoulders.

‘Excellent,’ Vi said, rising and reaching again for Hermione’s hand. ‘Let’s join Master at dinner, then.’

Hermione had been concerned that they would walk in after everyone else had begun to eat, but she was relieved to see that the house-elves were just beginning to serve as she and Vi took their seats, side by side, with Master Claudius seated on Hermione’s other side.

‘Are you well, petite?’ Master Claudius asked sotto voce without looking at her.
‘I am, sir. Thank you,’ she responded, happy that her answer was true.

The soup was served, and Hermione took a mouthful, her eyes scanning the long table. There were many festively arrayed witches and wizards at table, but Severus Snape was not among them. Kell caught her eye from down the table and gave a tiny thumb’s up from behind her soup bowl before Reg took the traitor hand in his. He pressed a kiss to it before placing it again in her lap … and keeping his hand there, as well, from the suddenly rapt expression on Kell’s face. Hermione smiled into her next spoonful of soup. Reg had certainly learned a way to keep Kell on the straight and narrow without raising his voice to her.

Hermione relaxed through the rest of dinner, finding that she was able to enjoy her food and converse with Vi and Master Claudius as she ate. She had only to deal with the moment in which she was living; for better or worse, the future would take care of itself.

When she set aside her crème brulée, she was full without being stuffed, and she felt perfectly prepared for what would follow next. A house-elf served her an espresso, and she sipped it, watching the movement of the witches and wizards around her. Dominants had begun drifting toward the Dominant’s Study, their voices raised in raillery, and the submissives at the table were beginning to move about, filling the Dominants’ deserted seats, chatting with their particular friends as they enjoyed coffee.

Claudius rose, excusing himself to Hermione and Vi, and moved to the doorway of the dining room most closely connected to the Study, his fair-haired head bent to listen to a shorter Dominant’s comment. She was surprised to hear a male voice behind her.

‘Ach, lassie, I am happy to find you here,’ the affable voice proclaimed, and Hermione turned a happy smile on the earnest face of Master Rufus Desmond, the visiting Scot Dominant.

‘Good evening,’ she said, still smiling. It was hard to resist such uncomplicated, unstinting admiration.

‘Is it true, what I hear? Is your training to end tomorrow night?’

‘It is,’ she agreed.

‘Will you dance with me, later?’ he asked solicitously. ‘I’ve been brushing up,’ he added, flushing a bit.

‘I will. Thank you for asking,’ she said.

With a sweet smile, he bade her farewell and headed for the Study, no doubt intent on obtaining a snifter of cognac.

When the clock in the corner tolled ten, Vi dabbed at her mouth with her napkin and turned to Hermione. ‘Are you ready to remove to the receiving room?’ she asked, referring to the room where the orchestra would be assembled to play for the assembled guests to dance.

‘I am,’ Hermione agreed tranquilly, rising. But as she was pushing her chair beneath the table, she heard Rafe Lestrange’s voice upraised in laughter.

‘Good one … ’ she heard him call, and strain though she might, she could not determine if he had called the name of a friend in his laughing exultation.

Taffy hurried to her side, elegant in her skin-tight, slinky white evening dress, and Hermione dimly thought that Rafe must have a particular preference for his wife in this pristine, virginal colour.
'Did you hear …?' Hermione said, and Taffy nodded.

'But I couldn’t tell what he said after,’ t added, and Hermione sighed.

*I won’t lose my centre,* she said to herself stolidly, though her heart still yearned to know to whom Rafe had been speaking.

She, t, and Vi wended their way through the other guests to the ballroom, where the musicians were tuning up for the first number.

'Shall we lead out the dance, petite?’ Claudius said, appearing at her side as from nowhere.

Hermione saw him—really saw him—for the first time that night. He was freshly barbered, his silvering blond hair razor-cut to perfection. He wore a suit of clothes she had never seen, having eschewed the typical Muggle white-tie evening clothes in favour of a custom-tailored Italian suit of silver-grey silk, worn with an ice-coloured necktie which blended perfectly with his eyes.

'Of course, sir,’ she said, moving into his arms.

His eyes were warm as he looked down into her face. He took the hand she placed on his shoulder and held it against his heart. She had the distinct feeling that he was demonstrating to the interested Dominants present that he would carefully vet her suitors—but she also felt he was demonstrating to her the fact that he was willing to court her, to win her favour.

To her great relief, Master Claudius did not attempt to chat her up, but when their dance ended, as they stood in the middle of the dance floor, he very lightly kissed her lips, which he had never done before. Hermione was shocked by his actions, but he made no move to prolong the embrace, and she had no desire to make it more noticeable by her reaction.

'With whom else will you dance tonight?’ he asked, reaching out to touch one of Hermione’s dark brown corkscrew curls.

'With whomever asks me,’ Hermione answered.

'Then I’m in luck,’ David Osborn said, gliding up to Hermione fluidly, his self-assured smile drawing an answering smile from her. ‘Will you dance with me, Hermione?’

Without a thought, Hermione flowed from Claudius into David’s arms, and the music began, slow and sultry.

'I hear you’re free, after tomorrow night,’ David murmured, his warm breath stirring the hair at her temple.

'It’s true,’ she answered, enjoying the feel of his arms about her, living in the moment. ‘I’ll be making my debut in the Dungeon.’

David leaned back a bit from her, his eyes intent on her face. ‘I’m looking forward to that, Hermione,’ he said significantly, his eyes flicking down her body, then again to her face. ‘I will very much enjoy seeing … all of you.’

Hermione took this statement in stride. ‘Will you?’ she asked quizzically.

‘I will,’ he promised solemnly, and absurdly pleased by this, Hermione permitted him to hold her closely for the remainder of their dance together.
When the song ended, Hermione stepped back to applaud.

‘My dance now, I think?’ a French-accented voice said, and Hermione bestowed a welcoming smile on Alain Devereux.

‘Hello!’ she said, as Master David surrendered her graciously to the Frenchman. ‘How have you been this past month?’

Alain gathered her close, smiling into her eyes. ‘I am far more interested in hearing about you,’ he insisted. ‘What is this I hear about your training Master beginning tomorrow tonight to accept indications of interest in you?’

‘It’s true,’ she said, feeling the undeniable force of his Gallic charm. ‘But I’m still curious to know how you’re enjoying London.’

Alain spun her from him in the dance, pulling her back with a practiced move, startling a trill of laughter from her.

‘How am I enjoying London?’ he said, dipping her backward and smiling down into her eyes. ‘Oh, more every day, I assure you—and I’m sure tomorrow night will be the highlight.’

Hermione was still laughing from Alain’s flirtatious antics when Rufus Desmond approached her.

‘Will you dance with me, Hermione?’ Master Rufus asked, and Alain kissed her hand before placing it in that of his rival.

‘I’d like that,’ she said honestly, elated by her popularity, revelling in the attention she was receiving, permitting herself to enjoy the triumph of being an attractive submissive witch with many suitors.

She and the Scotsman conversed easily as they danced, and Master Rufus did not tread upon her toes even once. As the song came to an end, he said, ‘Ah, but you’re a lovely girl, Hermione—I would very much like to spend more time with you.’

‘And perhaps you shall—but for now, you must go to the end of the queue.’

Hermione felt the ecstatic rush of hearing his voice, and the joy rose up in her with such force that she could scarcely contain her glee. She turned, Master Rufus forgotten, and feasted her eyes upon Severus Snape. Tall and imposing, he wore immaculate white tie and tails, his Order of Merlin glittering upon its sash. His hair shone like a raven’s wing beneath the candlelit chandeliers, and though he had addressed his words to Rufus Desmond, he had eyes for only Hermione.

‘May I have this dance?’ he said in a tone completely different from the one with which he had addressed Rufus, as if the words were not meant to be heard by anyone but Hermione.

She didn’t speak but walked into his arms just as the music began.

Rufus Desmond stood where she had left him, an expression of perplexed annoyance on his face. ‘But I thought he was your ex,’ he said somewhat peevishly.

‘Alpha and omega as well, old man,’ Severus said, and in the next instant, he swept her away.

‘Hello,’ she said softly, inwardly marvelling at how well he danced. Had he got to practice often at Death Eater gatherings?

‘Hello,’ he responded, his attention wholly focussed on her.
‘I was afraid you wouldn’t come,’ she confessed, feeling silly now that she had been so worried.

‘I would have been with you sooner,’ he said with the slightest touch of humour, ‘but the throng was impenetrable.’

She laughed up into his face, her delight bubbling up irrepresibly. ‘That’s absurd!’ she said, feeling as bright as a shining star.

A smile touched his eyes, though his lips did not curve, and the hand at her waist tightened imperceptibly. ‘I would not have missed it for the world,’ he murmured, and her eyes closed for a moment in a thrill of pure pleasure.

He held her in his arms for the next song, and the next song, and the next, and though her other suitors watched in puzzlement from the side of the room, they did not approach her, nor seek to divide her from her hawkish swain.

‘I knew the dress would look this way on you,’ he murmured into her ear. ‘You are the belle of the ball, Hermione—there is a radiance in you that shines in no other woman present here tonight—and the three D’s would very much like to hex me, so they can bask in your light again.’

She raised her head from his shoulder, intoxicated by the feel of his arms, the smell of his aftershave, and the sound of his heart-stopping voice. ‘Three D’s?’ she queried. ‘Like in Apparition?’

Hermione couldn’t help the laugh she uttered. ‘Not Dufus,’ she scolded. ‘Rufus!’

The last song came to an end, and he looked down into her eyes. ‘Call him what you will—he’s still a dunderhead. Not one of them is worthy of you.’ He glanced at them again, then back to her. ‘Save for Claudius, of course—but I had not been aware, before he kissed your mouth tonight, that he was in the running.’ He touched the bracelet. ‘He’s wooing you properly, I see.’

Hermione stepped back from him, some of the magic of the evening seeping away at this turn of subjects. ‘Please don’t speak disparagingly of Master Claudius,’ she said quietly. ‘He’s been very good to me.’

Severus nodded tersely. ‘You’ve learned a great deal from him,’ he agreed. His brow furrowed, and fleetingly, he touched her cheek. ‘I am not like him,’ he said. ‘I never shall be. We are completely different sorts of men.’

‘I would never wish for you to be other than who you are,’ Hermione said simply.

He studied her for a long moment, and though there were many people passing about them, it seemed to Hermione as if they were alone in the room.

‘Very well,’ he said at last, and she wondered if he were responding to her last words or to some thought of his own.

‘Would you …’ She hesitated, then rushed on. ‘Would you kiss me?’

Now a new smile touched his eyes, this one speculative. ‘Is that all you’re permitted?’ he asked, a sly, barely perceptible goad in his tone.

‘Yes,’ she responded promptly, ‘it is.’
‘Poor little girl,’ he said, and now his tone was intimate, caressing. ‘What a long night it will be for you.’

Hermione deliberately held his gaze, wanting to feel the bliss of his mouth on hers, wanting him to see her yearning. She had been so sure of him when she was in his arms, dancing, but now, his words stirred the residue of fear in her heart.

Then he lowered his head, angling to place a chaste kiss upon her lips. Unlike her passive acceptance of Claudius’ kiss, she wrapped her arms about Severus’ neck, her mouth mobile beneath his, and though he did not part his lips to taste her, he did cradle the back of her head in his hand and permitted the kiss to go on a beat or two longer than was entirely proper.

When he moved to break the kiss, she let him go, though she kept her hands upon his shoulders.

‘Tell me you’ll be in the Dungeon when I’m on display,’ she invited.

He shook his head minutely, one side of his mouth quirking. ‘I see you’re still an impudent girl,’ he said. He took her hand and kissed it. ‘Good night, Hermione.’

He stepped back from her, bowed slightly, then turned and left the room.

‘Good night,’ she answered, but he had already gone.
Chapter 82

For the Potions Master’s Amusement

Chapter 82: Tributes and Tales

Taffy Lestrange brandished her wand and moved an elaborate, gilt edged mirror into place behind the dressing tables that sat side by side in the Roissy House nursery. Marcus and Daisy were sleeping in their cots, and the room was flooded with the bright afternoon light. Hermione sat at a dressing table, her hair a clean, if bushy, mass about her face. In a lovely basket on the surface before her were dozens of perfect, fragrant white rosebuds. Behind her, forming a semi-circle of loving support, were Kell, Vi, and t.

‘And we’ll all have our hair up, with the roses nestled in?’ Hermione asked, her eyes meeting t’s in the newly placed mirror.

‘Yes, as a sign of solidarity,’ t said. ‘The white will be pretty in your dark hair.’

She picked up a brush from the tabletop and began to brush through Hermione’s hair. As ever, Hermione closed her eyes, feeling relaxed and pampered when someone else brushed her hair. Then she heard a sound, and she turned her head to see Elinore’s chair just inside the room.

‘May I join you, Hermione?’ the older witch asked diffidently.

Hermione felt surprise, but she hoped it didn’t show on her face. Elinore had been distant ever since Hermione had returned to Roissy House—not rude, but certainly noncommittal—yet here she was. Perhaps another sort of girl would have sent the older woman away, but Hermione did not hesitate.

‘Of course,’ she said, hoping Elinore would not feel it was necessary to give a long explanation of her earlier behaviour. They both knew why Elinore had been doubtful of Hermione’s actions and motivations—it was a rift that only time could repair.

Elinore allowed her chair to float into their midst, until she was directly to Hermione’s left, seated before the second dressing table. Her intentions were clear, but Vi moved in place behind her, taking up the place t occupied behind Hermione.

‘Shall I put your hair up?’ Vi asked, and at Elinore’s nod, Vi began.

Kell moved between the two pairs, and taking the Sleekeazy’s Hair Potion from the dressing table, she passed it to t. ‘How do you feel?’ she asked, anxious eyes on Hermione’s face.

‘Nervous,’ Hermione admitted with a rueful grin. ‘I’m going to be so embarrassed … and then, I don’t know what’s going to happen!’

Taffy worked a glop of Sleekeazy’s between her hands and began to spread it through Hermione’s hair. ‘You may feel self-conscious for a little while, but the self-consciousness will wear off,’ she said confidently. ‘You certainly have nothing to be embarrassed about. I wish I still had the body of a nineteen-year-old!’

The other submissives murmured their agreement with this statement.

‘And as for what will happen afterward,’ t continued, her fingers still busy in Hermione’s mane, ‘that’s the easiest part of all. What will happen is just exactly what you ask for!’
Hermione watched t’s hands, chewing on her lip. ‘What if … what if what I want—who I want—isn’t there?’

Kell knelt, and Hermione glanced down into her wide blue eyes. ‘I saw him last night,’ Kell said bracingly, taking Hermione’s hands. ‘He never took his eyes off you. You were dancing and laughing with the other Doms, so you didn’t see him, but he watched you like a hawk.’

Oh, I hope it’s true! Hermione thought, but she only pressed Kell’s hands in thanks. She was afraid to voice her thoughts—a afraid that speaking it aloud would prevent her from receiving her heart’s desire.

Taffy took up a wide-toothed comb and began to stroke it carefully through Hermione’s hair, distributing the hair potion evenly. To her left, Vi had already begun to wind Elinore’s silver hair about her head, securing it with pins. There was a discreet knock at the door, and Popkin, the house-elf assigned to the nursery, scurried to open it. Pitty entered, her scrawny arms full of different sorts of flowers.

‘Are all those going in my hair?’ Hermione asked, watching in the mirror as Pitty advanced.

‘No,’ t said, a vicarious self-satisfaction in her tone. ‘These are presents for you!’

Hermione turned curiously, as t and Vi deserted their seated friends to investigate Pitty’s finds.

‘These is coming all at once, from Paul Thomas Flowers,’ Pitty said excitedly.

‘But,’ Hermione objected, ‘that’s a Muggle florist! I’ve walked by the shop!’

Vi plucked a posy of coral-pink peonies from Pitty’s arms. ‘Oh, they’ve a wizarding section, as well,’ she said dreamily, slipping a wide vellum card from amongst the blooms and passing it to Hermione. ‘Their head house-elf delivers directly to Pitty.’

‘Vi should know,’ Kell said roguishly. ‘Master Claudius sends her flowers all the time.’

Vi looked up from the peonies. ‘I love the way these smell,’ she said. ‘Who sent them, Hermione?’

Hermione looked at the card. ‘This is one of Master David’s visiting cards,’ she said. ‘He’s written, “Blooms for the lovely on the night of her debut—here’s hoping that you call on me—Best, David.”’ She blushed with pleasure and reached out for the flowers, which Vi placed in her arms. ‘These are the first flowers I’ve ever received,’ she said, marvelling.

‘Well don’t water them!’ t cried, leaning over to dab tears from her eyelashes. ‘Salt water is the worst for fresh flowers!’

Next, Vi took up a spray of purplish-blue delphinium. Taffy relieved Hermione of the peonies so she could receive the new bouquet.

‘Is there a card?’ Kell asked, clearly revelling in her involvement.

‘Here it is,’ Hermione murmured, discovering a blue card affixed to one of the blooms. ‘It’s from Alain Devereux. It says, “With best wishes on your special night.”’ Her nose wrinkled. ‘I think he just picked that one from the rack in the shop.’

‘Oh, I like those colours,’ t said, directing their attention to the bouquet of lavender roses, interspersed with something bluish and prickly-looking.
‘Those must be from Rufus,’ Elinore said thoughtfully. ‘Who else would put Scottish thistle in a bouquet?’

Hermione opened the wax-sealed parchment she had found amongst the thistles. She perused what had been written in cramped, inelegant handwriting, and then she read aloud for her companions, “Tonight we shall see you in all your glory, and glorious it shall be. I shall be waiting, Hermione, and I hope you will task me with your pleasure. Always, Rufus.”

‘Yes, that sounds just like him,’ Elinore said. ‘He’s a very good man, and we have enjoyed having him to stay. Do you like him, Hermione?’

Hermione passed the rose and thistle bouquet to Kell and eyed the last offering, hoping against hope it would be from …

‘I’m sorry?’ she said, looking around at Elinore. ‘Do I like Master Rufus? Yes, he’s very solid, isn’t he?’

‘And filthy rich,’ Kell muttered, making Hermione giggle.

Vi stepped forward and knelt beside Hermione, laying the last posy in her lap. Kell looked at the round bouquet of dark mauve flowers. ‘Maybe these are from Master Severus,’ she said.

‘A garland of calla lilies?’ Elinore said incredulously. ‘No, he would never choose such an offering!’

‘Why not?’ Kell asked curiously, but no one answered her.

Hermione took up the card from the bouquet, knowing it was callous to feel disappointed in the face of such abundance, and she read the flowing script she recognised so well from their exchanges in her journal.

“Blooms both beautiful and delicate for you, petit, on the occasion of your debut. I am now and always, regardless of your final choice, at your service. It will be my honour and my pleasure for you to call upon me in any capacity, tonight and forever. With love, Master Claudius and Violet.”

This time, it was Vi who dabbed the tears from her cheeks. ‘This is the bouquet he sent to me upon my debut,’ Vi said fondly, ‘and it’s the same bouquet I carried at our wedding.’

Hermione swallowed and touched the edge of a blossom with one finger. ‘You’ve been too, too good to me,’ she whispered through a throat clogged with emotion.

Vi gave her a quick hug and kissed her cheek. ‘We love you,’ she said before releasing Hermione and straightening up again.

Hermione held the wedding bouquet of lilies in her lap, studying them thoughtfully, as she began to braid her hair, and Elinore moved her chair from before the mirror so Vi could seat herself there. The voices of the other women were a soft, comforting counterpoint to Hermione’s thoughts. Master Claudius was a good man, principled, conscientious, responsible, and caring. He was also handsome, charismatic, and Dominant, which trumped all of his other characteristics in Hermione’s eyes. He was much older than she—older, she believed, than Severus and Rafe—but he understood her completely. How many women could say that about the man who wanted to possess them?

Still, for all his many good qualities, there was one Claudius lacked: He did not stand her world on end by the mere fact of his existence. The sound of his voice didn’t make her heart race. The touch of his hand didn’t deprive her of the ability to breathe properly. He lacked the aura of Dark danger which enveloped Severus Snape like a second skin, and for good or ill, Hermione craved that peril
with an addict’s need. But on a deeper level, below the mere physical thrill she received from his touch, there lay the spiritual bond upon which they had touched many times in their dealings together. Surely that sort of thing wasn’t common, was it? Her professor had certainly been dumbfounded by it.

‘Have you told Hermione about your debut night, t?’ Vi asked from her chair, behind which Kell worked, twining Vi’s long blond hair about her head.

‘I never have,’ t replied, beginning to roll and pin Hermione’s unnaturally smooth hair.

‘Well, tell!’ Hermione urged, happily drawn from her own thoughts.

‘I met Rafe at a non-D/s party and fell for him instantly,’ t said. ‘After bit of investigation—well, I really just just badgered Horace Slughorn until he confessed all he knew about Rafe’s interests—I attended a party for the D/s-curious, held at the home of Master Aulus. Rafe and Severus were there—oh my God, my least favourite professor from school was at a D/s party!—and I could tell by Rafe’s reaction that he was shocked to see me there, the girl who had chatted him up at Professor Slughorn’s cocktail party. He brushed me off when I went up to speak with him.’ She chuckled and paused in her work to meet Hermione’s eyes in the mirror. ‘He embarrassed me, he was so dismissive. My face was burning, and Severus even gave me a rather pitying glance!’

Hermione laughed with t, imagining the scene in her mind. ‘Of course,’ t went on, ‘I was no older than you are now when that happened, and I didn’t have the sense to believe that “no” meant “no”!’ So I asked Master Aulus and Jane to mentor me, and I began training with them.’

Hermione remembered Master Aulus, a member of the Board of Trustees for Roissy House, from her first party weekend. At that time, his submissive, Jane, who was married to another man, had been eight months pregnant. Hermione had been shocked at the time, to find a woman married to another man and pregnant with his child with someone else at a Dungeon party. She understood it a bit better now, but it was still hard for her to imagine lovely Taffy Lestrange in training with Master Aulus.

‘I enjoyed my training, but no one I met electrified me like Rafe did,’ t said, returning to her occupation with Hermione’s hair. ‘I saw him at Roissy House party weekends, and I knew he was noticing me, but he always stayed away from me. You see, there were no Lestranges at Hogwarts with me, and I was there between the two wars—I had no idea about Rafe’s brothers being in prison, or anything about the family’s affiliation with You-Know-Who. All I knew was that I wanted him, and I knew he wanted me, but he just wouldn’t cooperate with me!’

Hermione murmured her understanding, feeling her heart ache for t. It was, in some ways, good to know she was not the only submissive who had to work extra hard to gain and keep the attention of the man she wanted.

‘Then one night, near the end of my training, Rafe asked permission from Master Aulus to play with me, and I was so excited, I thought I would die of it! He tied me to the cross and flogged me, one of those long, drawn out floggings where the anticipation builds and builds …’

‘Oh, yum,’ Kell breathed, and the other submissives chuckled in agreement.

‘When he took me down, I was dying for him, but he refused to touch me with his hands. It was as if he was trying to give in to me and protect me from myself—from him—all at the same time. He took me into the shadows and ordered me to finish it myself, and he stood over me while I spread out on a sofa and did it, staring him in the eyes the whole time. I could see how hard he was—I knew he wanted me—but nothing I could do or say would convince him to just fuck me and put us both out of our misery!’
Hermione found herself strangely aroused by hearing this story and imagining T and her Master locked in the battle of wills which had eventually led to their union, and later, their marriage.

‘After I came, he leaned over me, until his nose was almost touching mine, and he told me he knew I could come again—and that if I did, he would let me suck his cock.’ Taffy took a deep breath and let it out again rather comically, breaking the tension of her auditors. ‘Well, as you can imagine, I did what he wanted, and then he let me do what he had promised—and when it was done, when I was kneeling on the floor between his knees with his come all over my face and some even in my hair—he dragged me up by the elbows and said, “For the love of all that’s holy, girl, stay away from me.”’

‘But you didn’t, did you?’ Kell asked, completely rapt in the story.

Taffy laughed. ‘Well, he stayed away, which was virtually the same thing,’ she said. ‘My debut night came, and Rafe was nowhere to be seen. I found out later than he and Severus participated in a duelling tournament in Belgium that weekend. So I asked four of the Dominants who had shown interest in me to play with me that night. I asked one to whip me, one to wax me, one to finger me, and one to fuck me.’

Hermione couldn’t repress the little gasp she uttered, and T bent over until they were cheek to cheek, looking at one another in the mirror.

‘I know you can’t imagine that, love,’ T said quietly. ‘But I had played with many Doms during my training, and though I wanted Rafe, I wasn’t going to go without my fun because of his behaviour.’ She straightened again and began weaving the plaits she had made of Hermione’s hair into the elaborate coiffure she was creating. ‘One of the Dominants I played with that night—the one whom I went to bed with—was Bill Jaffords.’

Taffy’s hands stilled, and Hermione was aware of the watchful attention of the other witches.

‘He was a … very poor Dominant,’ T said pensively.

‘He was criminally negligent, as determined by the Roissy House Board of Directors,’ Elinore said staunchly. ‘That ought never to have happened to you, Taffy.’

‘What did he do?’ Hermione asked, half afraid to hear the answer.

‘He suspended me by the arms,’ T answered. ‘I had had my hands bound, and I thought he knew what he was doing—but he didn’t. He left me that way for too long, and one of my shoulders was dislocated.’

‘Oh, no,’ Hermione said, horrified.

‘She had brachial nerve damage, as well,’ Elinore said, her expression leaving no question of her opinion of the Dominant in question. ‘We had Taffy here, caring for her the next day, when Rafe arrived. He had heard about the incident from Master Aulus, and he was … incensed.’

‘Crazed, really,’ T said lightly. ‘He took me home with him, against the objections of just about everyone, and he tended me with his own hands while Severus looked for Bill. Bill knew he had ruined himself for the D/s community, but Rafe wasn’t content with that. He wanted to make it public.’

‘He wanted to make sure a dangerous Dominant couldn’t find a place in another D/s community in the UK,’ Vi said. ‘He was right to pursue it.’

‘So, Severus found Bill and brought him back, and Rafe duelled with him.’ Taffy swallowed. ‘If
Severus hadn’t been there, I’m not sure …’

‘Severus was there,’ Elinore said soothingly. ‘He stopped the duel when Jaffords was disarmed, and he and Rafe brought the brute before the Board. He was blackballed with every D/s community in the country, and the last I heard, he had emigrated.’

Taffy nodded once, with finality. ‘So, in the end, I got what I wanted—Rafe. But he has always held himself responsible for what happened on my debut night, even though it’s completely irrational of him.’

Hermione stood abruptly and turned into t’s arms, embracing her wordlessly. Taffy hugged her back, rocking her gently.

‘It’s all right, really,’ she said. ‘It was a long time ago, and it all worked out for us, just as it will for you.’ She gently man-handled Hermione back into her chair. ‘Now, be still!’ she ordered with mock ferocity. ‘This is an intricate process!’

Hermione laughed and settled down. ‘All right, I’ll sit,’ she said. ‘But I could really use a happier story—will you tell me yours, Vi?’

Vi stood, her up-do now complete, and gestured for Kell to take the seat she had vacated. Taffy rotated Hermione’s chair, so that they now faced Vi and Kell; Hermione could no longer see her reflection in the mirror, but she did preferred to watch Vi’s mobile face as she told her tale.

‘I took my training here, at Roissy House, so I was very familiar with all the Dominants who frequent our parties,’ Vi began, brushing through Kell’s shining cap of dark hair.

‘Was Master Claudius your training Master?’ Hermione asked, wondering why she had never thought to ask before.

‘Oh no,’ Vi said, turning to smile at Elinore. ‘I trained with Hadrian and Elinore.’

Hermione blinked. Vi had trained with Hadrian and Elinore? Slept in their bed with them, as Kell had done with Claudius and Vi? She couldn’t imagine it! Hadrian was old enough to be her father, at the very least …

‘At the time of my debut,’ Vi continued, ‘I didn’t have one particular Dominant in mind to whom I wished to offer my submission. I knew many Dominants I admired, and Hadrian had been generous permitting me to play with Dominants who requested me, but I hadn’t developed a preference, yet.’

Hermione watched Vi’s hands in Kell’s hair, which was too short to put up. So Vi made tiny parts long Kell’s hairline and alternated a row of twisted strands with a row of tiny plaits, each row ending near the crown of Kell’s head. What would it have been like to take your sexual pleasure from many different men, without having a decided preference for any of them?

‘And don’t think from listening to Violet that no Dominants had a preference for her,’ Elinore said fondly. ‘She was sought after, but terribly particular.’

Vi smiled without taking her eyes from her busy fingers. ‘If it had been permitted, I would have remained with Hadrian and Elinore indefinitely,’ she said, ‘but Hadrian believed it would be better for me to seek my own Master. There were interviews arranged for the weekend following my debut, but of the three Dominants who wished to be considered, only one of them was present for my presentation. So, I made a list of the Dominants I most trusted and admired, and when the time of my public display was finished, I asked them for what I wanted.’
Hermione said, ‘And what was that, Vi? What did you ask for?’

Vi glanced over at Hermione. ‘I wanted them to use me simultaneously,’ she said simply. ‘I asked one who was waiting by the dais when my display was over, and I asked three Roissy House Dominants, all of whom agreed, as a favour to me.’

‘Who were they?’ Hermione asked, and she was conscious of t’s hands going still in her hair.

‘The first was Christopher Bradford, a Master from the D/s community in Exeter, and later, I actually spent three months living with him in his home. But we came to a mutual agreement not to pursue the relationship, and I came back to stay with Hadrian and Elinore for a bit after that.’ Vi looked down again at Kell’s hair. ‘The other three Dominants you know,’ she said. ‘Hadrian was one, Master was the second, and …’ Vi looked into Hermione’s eyes. ‘And the last of the group was Master Severus.’

Hermione felt as if she had been hit in the stomach by a football. Her lips parted, but she didn’t speak —she didn’t know what to say. She knew Severus had been active in the D/s community for years before she came along and was well aware that he had been with many different submissives—he had to have been! He certainly hadn’t been chaste; such a notion was ridiculous. But she had never asked for a list of women with whom he’d played, and she knew that he would not have provided her with it, anyway. Still, she had been perfectly happy not knowing who his sexual partners had been before her, hadn’t she? And did she want to think of him being intimate with Vi? Was she ever going to be able to remove that image from her mind?

‘He didn’t ask for me, Hermione,’ Vi said, as if it were important to her for this distinction to be made. ‘He agreed to my request, as a courtesy to Hadrian.’

Hermione nodded once but still did not speak. He agreed to have sex with Vi as a courtesy to Hadrian? A likely story! Vi was beautiful—taller and more slender than Hermione had ever been, with a stunning figure—Severus Snape would have been a fool to turn down the chance to have sex with her!

Taffy resumed the gentle tugging and twisting at her scalp, and Hermione realised that all of them were expecting an outburst of some sort from her. Well, they would be disappointed, then, because she was deepening her breathing, focussing on her centre, and letting go of the burning jealousy she felt. She wouldn’t let them see how disconcerted she was!

‘I wanted to be totally filled—completely used—and my debut Dominants gave me what I requested,’ Vi reported tranquilly. ‘To prepare me, they strapped me to the St Andrew’s Cross, and Master Severus applied the clamps to my nipples and to my clitoris.’

Kell winced outwardly, and Hermione’s eyes narrowed. A clamp on her clitoris? Ouch!

‘Then Christopher flogged my back while Master Severus stood on the other side of the cross, where only I could hear him, and he … talked to me.’

Hermione swallowed, imagining Vi’s position, the heavy thudding of the leather flogger, and the filthy, taunting voice of Severus Snape. In spite of herself, she was aroused by the idea of it.

‘When I was properly prepared,’ Vi continued, sounding for all the world as if she were describing a garden party rather than a sexual encounter with four men under the eyes of the entire London D/s community, ‘the clamps were removed, and I experienced an orgasm, which was … exquisite.’ She briefly closed her eyes before continuing. ‘Then Master lifted me in his arms, and I was moved back to the dais. A platform had been added, and Christopher stripped naked and lay down upon it. I was
placed astride his cock, and Master began to lubricate my bum for anal penetration. I was forbidden to orgasm until everyone was situated, but it was very difficult when I was being fucked from below and massaged from behind with so many eyes watching …’

Hermione tried to imagine what it would feel like to be stimulated by two different men at once with an audience and felt the heat between her legs increase.

‘When I was prepared, Master entered me very slowly, and I could feel the two cocks in me with just the thin wall between them, sliding together—and I came unglued.’

Hermione grinned to hear Vi used such imprecise terminology. Dear Merlin, anyone would come unglued under that kind of stimulation!

‘That’s when Master Severus grasped my hair and pushed his cock into my mouth, just as I had asked him to do.’

Kell actually made a tiny moaning sound in her throat. ‘Oh man, Vi, I wish I had talked to you before my debut,’ she said longingly. ‘Of course, it happened before I knew you, but still …’

Vi laughed lightly. ‘I was filled with three cocks, and at that point, Hadrian bent to whisper in my ear that I could start coming at any time, but that I would be used until the Dominants were all quite finished with me.’ A visible shudder ran through her, and Hermione felt it as well as saw it. ‘I lost count of my orgasms,’ Vi said. ‘I was conscious of the time when Hadrian took Master Severus’ place, and Master Severus put his lips to my ear and … talked to me, until it was all over.

Christopher and Master had the most difficult jobs, because they had to not come for as long as possible, but I think they have a spell they use for that when they want to last a long time. At any rate, when they had all come inside me, Hadrian magicked me upstairs into the bath, and he washed me with his own hands and put me to bed, telling me what a good girl I had been.’

She smiled around at the other four women. ‘It was the most amazing thing that had ever happened to me, up until the night my Master accepted my offer of submission.’

Oddly enough, Hermione found that her feelings of jealousy had faded away as Vi had told her story. It had obviously been just as Vi described it—a Dominant whom she trusted had agreed to participate in her debut night, which was to be all about her. Severus had undoubtedly enjoyed the verbal humiliation and fucking Vi’s mouth while all those people watched—he was, after all, a sadist and an exhibitionist—Hermione certainly couldn’t be angry with him or with Vi for having taken pleasure from one another before she had ever known them.

‘Finally!’ Taffy stepped back and rotated Hermione’s chair again, until she faced the mirror. ‘You’re beautiful, Hermione!’

Hermione gazed at the intricate arrangement of braids and swirls of sleek hair, adorned with rosebuds. ‘It’s lovely, t—thank you.’

Taffy placed the basket of rosebuds in her hands. ‘Now, put the flowers in our hair, to mark us as your attendants for tonight, and we’ll be all finished!’

Hermione completed the ritual by placing the rosebuds that denoted these women as her sisters and attendants on this special night. Then she gathered them about her behind Elinore’s chair and they gazed at their reflection in the mirror.

‘It’s perfect,’ Vi said softly.

The witches were tidying up the dressing tables when there was another knock at the door, and
Popkin hurried to open it.

‘Now what?’ Hermione said humorously. ‘I already have enough flowers to open my own shop.’

‘Oh, I think you’ll want this,’ t said, and the peculiar inflection in her voice made Hermione turn to the door with an odd fillip in her heartbeat.

Pitty crossed the floor bearing an item so strange-looking that Hermione could not at first place it.

‘What is that?’ Kell asked, sounding mystified.

‘It’s a flower,’ t said. ‘It’s called a Bird of Paradise.’

Hermione approached the exotic, single bloom in a heavy, cut-glass vase nearly as tall as Pitty. The stalk was as thick as a man’s finger, and the bloom consisted of three upright orange petals and three vivid blue petals, joined together in a shape reminiscent of a bird in flight.

Vi walked past the gathered women to Hermione, who had lifted the solid vase into her hands and was gazing in breathless wonder at the vibrant flower. Closing her hands about Hermione’s shoulders, Vi squeezed gently, a gesture of both encouragement and acceptance.

‘Is there a card?’ Kell asked, and t uttered a soft, happy laugh.

‘Oh, I don’t think she needs a card,’ Elinore said, smiling.
Chapter 83

For the Potions Master’s Amusement

Chapter 83: Debut

Hermione sat at the small desk in her bedroom in the Claudius apartments, writing in her journal. The left side of the desk was crowded with the floral tributes she had received for her debut night, save for the cut crystal vase containing her Bird of Paradise; it sat in solitary splendour on her right. Using the methods she had learned from Master Claudius, she poured her thoughts and concerns out on parchment, emptying her mind of the chaos which disturbed her peace. Not surprisingly, her writing showed she was wrapped up in the possibility that Severus would—or would not—be present for her debut, and running a close second was her cringing fear of appearing naked before a throng of people. Still, she reminded herself, her sisters would surround her with their love, their support, and their equally naked bodies, and she would simply be another one of many women present in Roissy House tonight wearing nothing but her own skin.

There was a knock at her door, and Master Claudius spoke from the other side. ‘May I come in, Hermione?’

She stood and crossed the room, opening the door. ‘Please come in, sir,’ she said.

He entered, and his cool, grey eyes assessed her as she stepped back. He closed the door behind him, something which he had never done before in her bedroom. Her heart rate increased, and she felt a flutter of fear, interlaced with … attraction. Lowering her eyes deferentially, she waited for him to speak.

Rather than speaking, he touched her chin, turning her face upward, and when she was looking into his eyes, he released her. ‘Your hair looks lovely,’ he said. ‘I like it this way very much.’

Hermione smiled, pleased with the sincere compliment. She had received few compliments on her appearance during her school years, and she still preened inside when someone she liked and respected paid her one. ‘Thank you,’ she said.

‘May we sit?’ he asked, and Hermione sat gingerly on her bedside, leaving the desk chair for him—but he sat beside her, his weight dipping the mattress. ‘Did you enjoy hearing Taffy’s and Violet’s stories of their debuts?’ he inquired.

Hermione nodded, thinking almost against her will of this man’s role in Vi’s debut night, his methodical preparation of her backside for penetration, then entering her, his cock sliding against that of the Dominant Vi straddled …

A knowing, intimate smile touched Claudius’ lips, and Hermione swallowed, feeling the flush stain her cheeks. He knew she’d been thinking about him in a sexual situation, and the knowledge pleased him, judging by the expression on his handsome face.

‘I see,’ he said, letting his knowledge of her carnal interest in his activities hang between them for a moment. Then he continued, ‘It was certainly a memorable night amongst the dozens of debut nights I have seen at Roissy House, over the years.’ His gaze flicked to her lips, then back to her eyes.

‘Your experience in this lifestyle, thus far, has been a strictly monogamous one, Hermione. That is certainly the preference of some people—but there is a whole world of experiences available to you. You may be happy with one man who prefers not to share your loveliness, or you may find that you
would be happier with a Master whose inclination is to help you explore all of your sexual fantasies—in a safe, sane, and consensual manner.’

Hermione didn’t know what to say, so she said nothing. It seemed that Master Claudius was implying that Severus Snape was something of a stick-in-the-mud when it came to the more daring practices of Dominance and submission—but Severus had participated in Vi’s debut night, in concert with three other Dominants, had he not? Hermione didn’t believe the professor would deny her the opportunity to have sexual relations with multiple partners, if it were her inclination to do so—providing he had control of the situation, as would be his right, should things progress the way she hoped they would—but she wasn’t at all sure that she had any desire to have several Dominants touching her at once. It was exciting to think about, but doing it? She wasn’t sure she was prepared for such a thing, or that she actually desired to have it happen to her.

After a moment, Claudius’ attention was drawn to the flowers on her desk. ‘Ah, so many tributes!’ he said with genuine pleasure. ‘Do you enjoy receiving flowers from so many admirers, petite?’

‘Yes!’ she answered, feeling relief to have moved on to a more comfortable topic. ‘Thank you for the bouquet—the lilies are beautiful!’

He gave her cheek a careless caress and stood. ‘It pleases me to give you gifts,’ he told her. ‘You are enchanting, Hermione. You are a quick learner, a young woman with the capacity for both steadiness of spirit and deep, driving passion. Many Dominants are attracted to these attributes, and it is only right that you should reap the benefit of their—of our—admiration.’

‘Sir,’ she said, hesitant about straying into less than comfortable territory, but too curious to desist, ‘how do you know that about me—that I’m capable of … deep passion?’ She finished softly after stumbling over the last two words, feeling suddenly embarrassed to say such a thing about herself.

He pulled her to her feet, standing much closer to her than he had done, as a rule, during the months of her training, and it dawned on her that he was using his skills as a compelling, Dominant man to attract and enthral her. ‘Don’t forget, petite, that I was there the night you were bound, naked, to the St Andrew’s Cross and whipped with the strap—and I was certainly curious enough to follow you into the dark and witness the … aftermath.’

Hermione was almost breathless with a blend of indignation—he had spied on her and her Master?—and arousal.

‘Violet received a particularly intense measure of my attentions that night, as a result of my response to your public humiliation,’ he said. ‘And, of course, I was also present the night you followed Kelly and her Master into the dark—what a naughty girl you were!’

And in an instant, Hermione’s indignation was swept away by embarrassment and shame. Claudius had known what she was doing to herself in the dark that night, while she listened to Kell and Reg making love?

‘You were a young submissive alone, without the protection of your Master,’ he reminded her gently. ‘I was supervising Kelly in the Dungeon that night, and I was watching over you, as well.’ He smiled, that sexy curving of his lips that made him cinema-star attractive. ‘Of course, it was a pure pleasure to do so.’

Hermione had a moment of clarity, seeing herself that long ago night, busily frigging away on the sofa, with Reg and Kell making love behind her, and Master Claudius, standing in the dark, watching it all. She was conscious of his eyes on her face now, and she knew instinctively that the slightest indication of interest on her part would prompt him to take her into his arms—to kiss her—
and she stepped back, averting her eyes.

‘Thank you, sir,’ she said noncommittally.

He stood before her for a moment, and Hermione could feel the weight of his gaze on the top of her head. At last, he said, ‘Very well, Hermione. Do you have any questions for me before tonight?’

‘No, sir,’ she responded quickly.

‘Then I will see you promptly at nine o’clock,’ he said, the cool, commanding tone returning effortlessly to his voice. ‘Keep in mind that if you have to relieve your bladder during your display, you will do it on the platform—so, if you do not wish to urinate in a chamber pot for the edification of the Dungeon tonight, I would recommend that you cease partaking of liquids early.’

Have a pee in front of everyone in the Dungeon? Oh, no, no, no! ‘I’ll do that—thank you,’ she said, finally looking at him again.

And with a curt nod, Master Claudius departed her room.

When next her bedroom door opened, mere minutes before nine, she started, moving to cover her nakedness, but she saw it was an equally nude Vi, and her hands fell to her sides. She was embarrassed even to be seen by her friend, her female friend, in this state—but what was the point of covering herself? She would not be permitted to do so when Claudius joined them, so she had best begin practicing it now.

‘How are you?’ Vi asked, her voice filled with tender concern.

‘About the way you’d expect,’ Hermione said miserably.

‘You can do this,’ Vi said firmly advancing on her. ‘You’ve practiced many, many times, so you know you can physically do it. You’ll go to subspace, and every thirty minutes, we will stand you up and rub your muscles.’ She stopped before Hermione and took her hands. ‘When it’s over, dearest, you’ll be able to ask for your reward—on this night, you may ask for whatever you want.’

Hermione felt her palms perspiring against Vi’s cool, steady hands, and she pulled away. ‘I’m going to be so embarrassed,’ she whispered, her voice rough with threatening tears.

‘I was, too,’ Vi assured her. ‘The first time Hadrian made me appear naked, I had to be dosed with a Calming Draught.’

Hermione was surprised into a snort of amusement, and Vi grinned.

‘Yes, it was pathetic,’ she said. ‘You’re doing very well, compared to me. You’re a Gryffindor, after all.’

Hermione blinked. ‘Are you from my House, too?’ she asked, diverted.

‘Oh, no,’ Vi said tranquilly. ‘I was in Hufflepuff House, with Reggie and Taffy. I was ahead of them at school, of course, but I knew who they were when they showed up here the first time.’

‘But how did you know my House?’ Hermione asked, puzzled.

‘It was all over the newspaper after the war, wasn’t it?’ Vi said reasonably. ‘But I would have known without reading it—I was there the night you fought the Death Eaters to keep us safe, Hermione. And you Healed Kelly when we thought she was dead—you’re terribly brave.’
Hermione smiled. ‘Or terribly foolhardy,’ she said, her spirits improved. ‘Either way, I suppose we’d best go out—I’d hate to have my last act as Master Claudius’ trainee be to anger him by being late.’

And hand-in-hand, the two girls entered the sitting room and stood together under the appraising eye of Master Claudius.

‘Fair and dark,’ he murmured, circling them, taking in their nude bodies from each possible angle. ‘Perfect foils for one another, my pretties.’

‘Thank you, Master,’ Vi said, and Hermione murmured her agreement, wishing she did not feel as if Vi’s husband were staring with frank, open interest at her breasts and pudendum.

They were distracted as there was a knock at the door to the corridor, and holding securely to Hermione’s hand, Vi led her to greet the rest of their retinue. In the corridor, t and Kell awaited them, and both girls kissed Hermione’s cheek before taking their places around her: Vi to her left, t to her right, and Kell behind her.

‘Am I late?’ Elinore said, gliding up to them in her chair, dressed in a white silk ensemble in deference to her age and infirmity, but the flowers in her upswept silver hair identified her as being one of Hermione’s attendants.

‘You are right on time,’ Claudius said, closing the door behind him. ‘Shall we go down, ladies?’

And without waiting for an answer, he led the way toward the grand staircase with Elinore directly behind him, forming the advance guard of Hermione’s entourage. Taking a deep, centring breath, Hermione stepped out, wearing her courage in place of her clothing, and went forward to her presentation.

The moment they began moving down the staircase, Hermione was aware of a respectful silence falling over the gathered guests below her. She had never witnessed another submissive’s presentation night, so she wasn’t aware of the protocols, but it was apparently the accepted practice for the onlookers to fall back and form a walkway through which the debutante and her attendants passed. Hermione was aware of people both nude and clothed, barefoot and shod, but she could not bring herself to raise her eyes to look at their faces. Instead, she studied the floor and the space between her and Elinore’s chair, the distance she must cover to proceed from here to there. Her face burned with shame, her hands were clenched at her sides, but she put one foot before the other.

For what felt like the first time all day, she wasn’t thinking about the professor, his whereabouts, or his state of mind. She was completely taken up with her own situation, her embarrassment, her nudity in the presence of this large group of D/s practitioners.

Then there was a momentary pause, and both t and Vi reached out to place a hand on Hermione, a wordless Wait!

‘Good evening, Brutus,’ Claudius said. ‘These ladies are with me.’

And they were moving forward again, through the Dungeon door, and down the stairs into the dark room, punctuated by areas of bright, hot light. Hermione risked a quick glance past Elinore and over Master Claudius’ shoulder. She saw that the largest floor space, that usually devoted to the St Andrew’s Cross and its various activities, had been cleared, the cross pushed back, flush against the wall, and in its place, the platform about which she had been told.

A flash of fear went through her, and she averted her eyes again, walking carefully down the Dungeon stairs. A wave of nausea roiled through her, and she had a momentary vision of vomiting...
down her naked front, shaming herself and Master Claudius forevermore. Stop it! she told herself fiercely, her spirits flailing desperately about for purchase in this pit of terror she now occupied. What would he want me to do?

Frantically, she sought her centre, knowing if she could focus, she could calm herself and her body’s reaction to the stresses of this night. She had been fine when she left her room, having done her exercises to establish her serenity, but this was all too much—too many eyes, too much nervous tension, and not enough assurance that it would all prove worth it, in the end. He had danced with her—shown his interest, his preference—sent her the exotic, singular bloom in its distinctive cut crystal vase—but would he be here for her tonight, subject himself to the curiosity of his peers? Would he risk her choosing someone else?

I need you! she thought despairingly.

And instinctively, she reached for him, her consciousness spreading out from her in ever-widening concentric circles, searching for the one whose presence would anchor her sufficiently to perform the task before her. Was he here? Was he tucked away in the pockets of darkness or standing tall among the upturned faces solemnly watching her progress? Barring that, was he perhaps in the house, indifferent to her plight but close enough for her to reach him?

Wildly, she felt for him, completely unsure if she could touch him this way—she had never tried, save when he was buried inside her body, moving with her in the rhythm only they could create together—but she needed him, oh so desperately, now. Was he near enough? Was he open to her?

‘Severus,’ she breathed, a whisper of sound passing unnoticed among her companions, and she felt the sickness in her stomach slowly subsiding as she concentrated all her efforts on finding Severus Snape’s consciousness amid the crushing mass of the countless minds in the house.

And a bead of peace seeped into her awareness, spreading from her mind through her body, calming her breathing, her heart rate, and her anxiety—and it was enough.

As they crossed the floor to the platform, Hermione saw the carpeted stairs. Then Elinore moved aside, and Claudius was speaking to her.

‘This is your final act of submission to me as a trainee, Hermione,’ he said. ‘You will kneel on the platform for me, displaying your body to the view of any and all who wish to look at you. There will be no need to speak. You will remain in position until you are told to move, either by Violet or myself. Do you understand me?’

‘Yes, Master Claudius,’ Hermione said, pleased with the strength of her voice. ‘I understand you, and I will obey.’

‘Good girl,’ he said quietly. ‘I know you will make me very proud.’

And he stepped to one side, to have Vi replace him. ‘We’re going up now,’ Vi said, taking Hermione’s hand and beginning to climb up the nearest stairs.

Hermione saw there were four sets of stairs leading up from each of the four sides of the platform. At the top was a large, dark red pillow, edged in braid of red and gold, and she had a moment of amused wondering—had the pillow been chosen with regard to her school House colours? And then she and Vi stood together on the platform, much closer to the bright lights, and Hermione had a momentary impression of what felt like a thousand eyes on her flesh, until she averted her eyes from them, focussing on her own feet.
‘You’ll kneel down, dearest,’ Vi said soothingly, her hand on Hermione’s shoulders, guiding her into position. ‘This is just exactly the same as what we’ve done over and over again. Relax into subspace, and before you know it, I’ll be back to rub your legs.’

Hermione settled into the submissive’s pose, naked to the air of the room—not to mention the eyes of the curious—but she pushed that knowledge away, concentrating instead on the many times she had done this for her Master, when she had been his possession, and safe under his black, fathomless gaze. The backs of her hands came to rest upon her thighs, and after checking to make sure that her knees were parted the same width as her shoulders, she closed her eyes, and began her vigil.

First there was the pillow beneath her legs, the texture silken against her skin. Then there was the brightness of the light shining above her, magically intensified for her benefit, no doubt. And last, the murmuring of the voices below and about her.

And within, a warm, steadying peace, a foundation upon which to build.

‘Stand, love,’ Vi said, and Hermione blinked owlishly up at the other girl’s face.

‘First break,’ t said from her other side, reaching down to place a hand beneath her elbow. ‘Can you stand?’

Hermione rose and t lightly kneaded her neck, her shoulders, and down her back, as Vi worked from her ankles upward. Hermione was suddenly hyperaware of their touch upon her skin, and for the first time since this public ordeal had begun, her nipples hardened, and she felt the first flush of sexual awareness. Then her attention focussed on the group standing directly below her, their faces upturned to her: David, Alain, and Rufus. Behind them, seated and unmoving, was Master Claudius, whose steadying grey eyes regarded her with unwavering attention. She smiled for him, and though his lips did not move, she saw a softening of his eyes, her acknowledgement from him.

Her friends then turned her, so that Master Claudius was on her right, and they encouraged her once again to lower herself to the cushion. As Hermione settled into position again, it dawned on her that her self-consciousness had faded away.

‘I would love to be with you tonight, kitten,’ the voice on her right said, and Hermione stirred from the depths of subspace, listening to the beguiling words. ‘My God but you’re perfect. Those nipples are begging to be pinched and pulled …’

Hermione identified the speaker as David Osborne, and her body responded favourably to his suggestion, her nipples pebbled, warmth settling in her belly.

‘Look at your pretty little pussy,’ another voice said, speaking from before her, and the accent identified the speaker as Alain Devereux. He sounded closer, somehow, as if he had climbed up a few of the steps. ‘Invite me to make you happy tonight, ma belle, and I will spend the hours until dawn finding ways to make you cry out. Ah, I want to taste you …’

A scuffling noise, and the voice again of Alain, no longer caressing. ‘I will thank you to keep your hands to yourself, monsieur,’ he said icily.

So, he wasn’t supposed to climb the steps, then …

And it was quiet in subspace, Hermione alone with her memories and the growing arousal of her body.
Second break,’ Vi said, and Hermione was glad of her friend’s steadying grasp on her arms as she rose up, pains of protest shooting down her arms and legs.

‘Lean back on me,’ Kell said, standing solidly at Hermione’s back, and Hermione obeyed her, relaxing as Vi stood before her, rubbing firmly up her arms, and knelt at her feet, massaging her legs. ‘You’re doing a fabulous job,’ Kell added, pressing a kiss to Hermione’s temple.

‘Perhaps your Masters will let you subbies play with your friend tonight,’ a jovial, unfamiliar voice said, but Hermione was too removed from the scene to be curious enough to look and see who had spoken.

‘And perhaps you’ll remember your manners the next time you pay a visit to Roissy House,’ Reg said firmly.

‘Oi!’ the stranger objected. ‘No need to be so proper!’

‘You’ll not speak to my wife in that familiar, disrespectful way, blockhead,’ Rafe said coldly, and Hermione heard another scuffling noise slowly fading away in the direction of the stairwell.

‘So much drama,’ Hermione murmured, allowing her friends to manipulate her limbs as if she were a rag doll.

‘Presentations draw all the idiots in England to Roissy House,’ t said. ‘That’s why the Doms are so careful of strangers on these nights.’

‘Do you want to wet your lips?’ Vi asked, offering a goblet with a straw protruding from it. ‘I wouldn’t take much, but you can have some, if you’re thirsty.’

‘I’m fine, thank you,’ Hermione said dreamily, accepting the pressure on her shoulders to resume her position, now with her back to Master Claudius.

‘She’s in deep,’ Kell said in a marvelling voice, as the girls began to move away from her.

‘She’s a remarkable submissive,’ t said, almost as if she were quoting someone else.

‘I know you probably won’t,’ Rufus Desmond said, and Hermione heard him as clearly as if he were on the platform with her, ‘but I’d be so happy if you chose me tonight, Hermione. I’m not proud—I’d be pleased to be one of a group—but if you’d just give me a chance, I’d do everything in my power to please you. You’re exactly the sort of lass I’ve always wanted for my own—smart and kind, sexy and pretty—the sort who’d give herself wholeheartedly to her Master …’

He as quiet for so long she thought he’d said everything he wished to convey.

‘I’m not a … a bloody war hero, and I’m not a dashing fellow, but I have my strengths. I’m steady, you see, not the sort to change every time the wind blows, and I’ve plenty of gold, and a decent old house in the highlands—ah, you wouldn’t be sorry if you’d just give me a chance …’

The stiffening of her upper leg muscles, which radiated into her hips, was making her terribly uncomfortable. She was all right, as long as she floated in subspace, but these soliloquies of the Dominants who hoped to fuck her when this ordeal was done were disruptive in the extreme ….

Ignore them. Focus.

Well, it was easy for the voice to say, wasn’t it? But she breathed in the intent, breathed out the
disturbance, and drifted.

‘Last break, dearest,’ Vi said, and she and T stepped in close to hold Hermione erect as they helped her stand.

‘Ow!’ Hermione murmured as the pains moved along her legs. ‘Why is this so much harder than the practices?’

‘More psychological stress,’ Kell said, her voice floating up from below, where she massaged Hermione’s legs with firm, sure movements. ‘It takes a toll on your body, too.’

Vi moved behind her, beginning to rub her neck. ‘You have only thirty more minutes,’ she said encouragingly. ‘Do you know what you’re going to do when it’s over?’

Hermione’s head lolled forward as she gave herself over to Vi’s clever fingers. When it was over? What did that even mean, really? She would be crouched on that red cushion until the end of time, wouldn’t she?

‘Have you made your choices?’ Kell asked, standing straight now, her warm, steadying hands on Hermione’s arm. ‘Who’s the lucky Dominant? David, Alain, and Rufus have been lurking about watching you like dogs hankering after a special treat.’

Hermione turned her face, brow furrowed, to T. ‘Is he here?’ she asked simply.

Taffy looked into Hermione’s eyes. ‘I haven’t see him tonight, love,’ she said gently.

‘But I … I feel him,’ Hermione said.

And her friends turned her again, so that Master Claudius was now on her left, and after assisting her to settle on the cushion, they descended the stairs, and she was alone.

And in the bliss of subspace, she brushed against his consciousness.

*I need you*, she said.

Warmth and strength cradled her, and she breathed deep and quieted.

*You are complete in yourself. You need nothing. You may pursue, instead, your desires.*

Hermione knew that if she struggled against the peace, she could rouse herself and deal with this challenge, but she did not wish to give up the comfort of subspace. So cleverly, she struck back with a sure thing.

*You need me*, she thought.

And though there was no lessening of the sense that she was held and cherished, to those words, there was no response.

When next she was roused, it was by large, sure hands, which pulled her first to her feet, then swung her up, into strong arms. She rested her cheek against his chest, and Master Claudius looked into her face.

‘Are you well, petite?’ he asked quietly.
‘Yes, sir,’ she answered, finding her voice with difficulty.

He carried her down the steps and sat in his chair with her in his lap. ‘Put your arms about me and hold on,’ he instructed, and Hermione was happy to do as she was told, for his fingers were finding the aches and strains in her legs and massaging them away. She clung to him and murmured her appreciation of his attentions into his shoulder as he worked her over, only becoming conscious of her nudity as he massaged to the mid-point of her thighs, then transferred his attentions to the small of her back, massaging out toward her hips with sure precision. Then he slid one hand up her back and cupped the back of her neck, his grey eyes studying her face.

‘Better?’ he inquired.

‘Thank you,’ she said, wondering how she could possibly convey her feelings to him adequately.

‘Let Violet take you to the ladies’,’ he said, assisting her to rise, ‘and when you return, I will present you to your peers.’

Hermione went thankfully into Vi’s arms, and Kell followed them into the restroom tucked down a side corridor from the Dungeon. Hermione moved into the toilet stall and relieved her bladder, marvelling how strange it was that she could go hours without the loo unless she was told she couldn’t use it, at which point she needed it every fifteen minutes.

That duty taken care of, she moved back into her friends’ midst, allowing them to pet and fuss over her, accepting a toothbrush and toothpaste from one, allowing another to tidy up her hair, allowing at last the application of a light, musky scent to the hollow of her throat.

‘Do you know what you’re going to do?’ t asked, clearly concerned. ‘What you’re going to ask for?’

Kell hovered near the door. ‘You can play with anyone you like, honey—it’s your night. It’s not a commitment. It’s more like a … a playdate.’

Hermione laughed, a clear, happy sound, and Vi hugged her from behind, her breasts pressed against Hermione’s bare back. ‘Master was just one of the men I played with on my debut night,’ she said into Hermione’s ear. ‘No Dominant would hold it against you if you wished to play with many before you settled to one. A good Master will encourage you to explore your boundaries.’

Hermione turned and pressed a quick kiss to Vi’s lips. ‘You’ve been the very best friend a girl could ever ask for,’ she said sincerely. ‘I will never, ever be able to thank you enough for taking me into your home and allowing your husband to train me to be a proper submissive.’

Vi flushed with pleasure. ‘We love you,’ she said. ‘You know you’re welcome to stay with us, if you choose. And if you wish to invite Master to play with you tonight, alone or with other Dominants, you may do so with my blessing.’

Taffy took her hand then, and Hermione turned to look into t’s concerned eyes. ‘Hermione, do you have a plan? You ought to, before you get there, and they expect you to say what you’d like to do.’

Hermione squeezed t’s hand. ‘I know,’ she said, releasing t and moving past Kell to the door.

‘But he’s not here,’ t said to Kell. ‘What’s she going to do?’

‘I don’t know,’ Kell replied. ‘But she’s got that look about her mouth, you know what I mean?’

‘Yes, I know,’ t and Vi said simultaneously.
Hermione heard them behind her, but she didn’t stop to explain herself; she had done all that had been asked of her, and she felt the emotion swelling within her like a balloon, the future a limitless horizon before her. She passed the people who moved courteously aside for her and her following—if rather farther behind than was customary—retinue. Ahead of her, Master Claudius stood, resplendent beneath the lights, a golden god of a Dominant. Hermione stopped before him and knelt at his feet.

Her legs protested the all too familiar position, but she ignored the twinges of her muscles and gave to Master Claudius the tribute she owed to him. She felt the light touch of his hand on her hair, and then his fingers touched her chin and she looked into his face, where he knelt across from her, knee to knee. Without speaking, he reached behind her head, and with precision born of long practice, he unfastened the collar she wore about her throat.

‘You have fulfilled every requirement for the completion of your training, Hermione, and I release you to find your own Master. Go with my blessing, and may all aspirants to your favour know that I stand behind you with the full faith and force of Roissy House.’

And as the collar was removed from her throat, he bent forward and kissed her mouth, his second such kiss, though this one was at once sweeter and more intimate than had been the one she received from him just the night before. Then he was on his feet, lifting her to her feet as well, and he turned her before him, so that she faced a small crowd which applauded enthusiastically. Hermione was aware of other groups in other parts of the room, carrying on as they would normally do, without regard for the debut of one submissive woman at this particular Dungeon party.

Then the interested Dominants were ringed about her, and posted watchfully behind them she saw Rafe and Reggie, their arms crossed over their chests, looking for all the world like bouncers at a Muggle night club, ready to put out anyone who caused trouble. On Rafe’s other side stood Hadrian with Elinore, white rosebuds in her hair. Hermione smiled around at them all, the joy in her heart irrepressible, with no dark foreboding to mar her happiness.

Directly before her stood Masters David and Alain, each of them watching her with bright-eyed interest. She began by stepping forward and offering a hand to each of them, which they willingly accepted.

‘Thank you so much for the flowers, both of you,’ she said, looking from one smiling face to the other. ‘You’ve made me feel pretty and sought after, and I can’t begin to tell you what that has meant to me.’

Alain lifted her hand to his lips, but David frowned down into her eyes. ‘This sounds to me like “thanks, but no thanks,”’ he complained, managing even so to sound good-natured.

‘That’s right,’ Hermione agreed cheerfully.

David shook his head, as if he couldn’t quite believe Hermione would not choose him, but the Frenchman released her hand, shrugging with Gallic fatalism.

‘Enjoy your evening, ma belle,’ he said, slipping away into the crowd, and David followed him, off to search out an adventure for the evening.

Reg shifted on the periphery of the group, a frown between his brows, but Rafe stood unmoving, his shrewd gaze scanning the crowd ceaselessly. Now Rufus Desmond stepped up to Hermione, a hectic colour in his naturally ruddy face.

‘Hermione,’ he said, and his voice was gruff with suppressed emotion. ‘Hermione, I …’
Hermione shook her head minutely, silencing him instantly. ‘Thank you for all you’ve said and all you’ve done—for all the attention you’ve paid a girl who received little of that in school,’ she said earnestly.

Rufus looked over his shoulder, noting that the people from the edge of the crowd had begun to melt back into the throng, and he looked back to Hermione. ‘But what do you mean to do?’ he said reasonably. ‘Play with your friends and their husbands?’

Hermione laughed merrily, so full of glee that she might have hugged the Scotsman if she hadn’t been stark naked. ‘That would be a fine night for me, don’t you think?’ she said gaily.

And Rufus frowned, stepping away from her and executing a jerky bow. ‘You know best,’ he muttered and stalked away, his obviously impaired dignity bristling like porcupine quills.

Reg moved forward a step, his gaze going over Hermione’s head to Claudius. ‘Is that what’s been decided?’ he asked, confused. ‘Have the girls decided it amongst themselves?’

But Hermione stood her ground quietly, her confidence unimpaired, her air of tranquillity drawing from Rafe a smirk, followed by a slow shaking of his shaggy head. Claudius, however, seemed somewhat perplexed, for he bent and placed his lips at her ear.

‘Petite?’ he queried. ‘What have you decided?’

Any time, now, she thought.

Hermione felt a movement at her back, as if Claudius would touch her bare shoulder. Then Rafe staggered slightly, his arms inexplicably filled with silvery grey fabric, and between Rafe and Hadrian appeared Severus Snape, his hair slightly disarranged from the discarded cloak, his black eyes fixed on Hermione’s face as with a burning question. He wore his customary black boots and black trousers, but rather than his usual black coat, he wore the white shirt she had only seen him in once, white lawn, with billowing sleeves gathered at the wrists and a froth of ruffles flowing down the front.

His pirate shirt, she thought, and she inhaled sharply, not because she had doubted he would be here—hadn’t he been in her head for the last two hours and more?—but because he had taken his sweet time revealing his presence to the others. She took one step forward and stopped, for he had not spoken aloud to her, and she had no clear idea of what she ought to do next. So she looked into his gaunt face, delight singing in her heart, and waited for him to show her the way.

And seconds ticked past as he looked at her, and she permitted him to look, open to the probing of his mind or the questions from his lips, a vessel of submission waiting to be claimed and filled. Didn’t he know? Couldn’t he tell? Her love for him burned within her like a flame, and still, he waited.

When at last he moved, it was the rising of his chest, as of a man who has been thought dead who finally draws breath. Hermione smiled a greeting, and the corners of his eyes crinkled in response—dear Merlin, but she wanted him! And then he took one step forward, his left hand extended to her.

Hermione did not hesitate, nor did she look left or right. She walked up and placed her hand in his, then knelt at his feet, slowly averting her face, until all she had of him was the clasp of his hand, the blurred image of his boots through her tears, and the steady, pulsating presence of his mind in hers.
Silence surrounded her, and peace pervaded, and jubilation rang and echoed in her with reverberating sweetness. Others encircled them—Rafe and Reggie, Hadrian and Elinore—and from behind her, forming a warm, insulating barrier, were Master Claudius, Vi, t, and Kell. And in the centre pocket of stillness were the two: Hermione Granger, accepting the extended hand while simultaneously offering obeisance, and Severus Snape, awestruck with reverence.

Then his hands were on her elbows, and he drew her to her feet. He looked down into her face, his thumbs gently caressing the skin of her arms, his eyes absorbing every detail of her appearance. She took the opportunity to look closely at him, hungry to feast herself on his beloved face. His beautifully formed lips were pressed together, as if to hold in an emotion too dangerous to let pass, lines of effort vertical slashes bracketing his mouth. He drew breath, and his nostrils flared briefly, his coal black brows arching slowly, luring to her lips a ready smile, which was reflected back to her by the crinkling at the corners of his eyes.

‘Yes?’ he said, the syllable wrapping itself sinuously about Hermione’s senses.

‘Yesss,’ she breathed, and the surrounding circle of people—people who loved her—laughed, as if she were a child who had said something terribly cute.

‘Indeed,’ he said with mock gravity, ‘but I will still require further instructions, you see.’ One of his hands maintained a steadying hold upon her arm, but the other strayed to her face, fingertips brushing across her cheek. ‘What do you want, Hermione?’

Her lips formed the word, but she felt momentarily too overcome to speak it aloud.

‘You.’

He actually laughed, and Hermione flushed. ‘Yes,’ he said. ‘Yes, you have procured me. Now, tell me in what way I can be of service to you.’

Her lips trembled with the sudden want of it. ‘Will you brush my hair?’ she said, swaying towards him. ‘And then spank me with the hairbrush? And … make me come?’

His arm slid down from her arm to encompass her waist, and he held her to him lightly, as if to make sure she stayed on her feet, rather than swooning. ‘I believe that will be possible, yes,’ he said steadily.

A thought occurred to her. ‘Unless … unless you don’t have a brush appropriate for that?’ She remembered with a pang the one he’d bespoke for her early on in their association, which she had left behind when she went away from Roissy House.

He did not answer her, but said, ‘Pitty.’

The house-elf popped into existence at the professor’s side. ‘Pitty is here, Master Severus, sir!’
‘Fetch the wooden box from my wardrobe,’ he instructed her, and Pitty was gone.

‘Are you sure you wish to disarrange your hair?’ he asked, touching one rosebud with a fingertip.

‘I’m sure,’ Hermione answered, relishing her place against his side, basking in the warmth of his body and the scent of his aftershave and that indefinable male smell she loved so dearly.

Rafe moved onto the platform, enlarging the surface with the flick of his wand and conjuring a forest green love seat, positioning the red cushion before it with the toe of his boot. Severus took Hermione’s hand and led her up onto the platform. He sat in the middle of the love seat and motioned for Hermione to situate herself on the cushion between his legs, where she subsided with a blissful sigh. She was surprised to see not only her particular friends conjuring chairs and sofas on the floor below her to watch the brushing of her hair—and the spanking to follow—but also other curious Dungeon visitors. She felt a touch of smugness to see Chassity and Ava, in their trainee collars, sitting together on a sofa and watching her with frank envy.

Pitty popped into the Dungeon again with an ebony-wood box inlaid along the top in mother-of-pearl, in a shape which looked suspiciously like the letter ‘H’. The house-elf offered the box to the professor, who accepted it and removed a shape wrapped in a bit of emerald green fleece—fabric which strongly resembled the blanket in which he was used to swathe Hermione after ministering to her in his study at Hogwarts. From it he withdrew Hermione’s own hairbrush, its silver back monogrammed with an ‘H’, and she was on her knees, looking up into his face.

‘You saved my brush?’ she said, touching it fondly.

‘Yes,’ he answered simply.

Hermione looked curiously at the box now on the loveseat beside him. ‘What else is in there?’ she asked, reaching to touch the inlaid ‘H’.

‘If you wish to have your hair brushed, then assume the appropriate position,’ he said repressively, and even as Hermione was returning to her place on the cushion, Pitty Disapparated with the mysterious box. Then Severus’ hands were in her hair, removing the hairpins and the white rosebuds, and Hermione luxuriated in his touch upon her scalp.

Master Claudius sat directly beneath her, as he had done while she was on display. Now Vi sat at his side on a small sofa, and he stroked her as if her skin were an animal pelt. Beneath his hands, Vi all but purred with pleasure. In an enormous armchair beside Claudius and Vi sat Rafe with his wife upon his lap, his lips at her ear and his hand between her thighs, buried in her hairless quim. Hermione had never seen such forthright displays as these from her friends before, and she was both shocked and aroused, looking away in embarrassment, then finding her eyes drawn back to the expressions on Vi’s and t’s faces—excitement, on the road to rapture.

‘Do you see them?’ Severus said, his voice pitched for her ears alone, beginning with a section of her hair to brush tangles from the ends first and working his way up to her scalp. ‘They were so aroused by watching you for two hours, naked and open to their eyes, unguarded and available, that they can’t help themselves—they have to touch and be touched. No, don’t turn your eyes away—this is a tribute to you.’

So Hermione watched obediently, her body, primed by two hours of subspace, all ready for further arousal and responding to t’s moans of pleasure and pleas to be allowed to climax, softly but firmly refused by her Master. Beside the Lestranges, under Claudius’ ever more demanding hands, Vi was coming unwound, her cool, blond serenity dissolving in the chasm of passion her Master awoke in her. He had dragged her across his lap, hands busy at her nipples, though both of them still watched
Hermione.

‘They all wanted you,’ Severus said, still speaking softly, moving to another section of her hair. ‘Even your submissive sisters wanted you—wanted to rub their breasts against you, feeling their nipples harden against yours while they kissed your pretty mouth, wishing most of all to taste your fragrant cunt.’

Hermione shuddered beneath his hands, simultaneously aroused and repelled by the vision he produced of her trading caresses with her girlfriends, while under her wondering eyes, their Masters reduced them to creatures of pure passion.

‘And of course, any Dominant in this room, married or otherwise, would have been proud to make this night memorable for you,’ he continued, beginning on the last section of her hair, patiently detangling. ‘The three D’s were each one longing to fuck you on this platform—one at a time or all at once—they would have given you any boon you requested tonight.’

Now he was making full strokes from her scalp to the ends of her long brown hair, following the path of the brush with the flat of his hand, controlling the hair as effortlessly as he controlled her, reducing her to a boneless, sodden mass of longing.

‘Oh my, look at Reg and Kelly,’ he said, and Hermione dragged her eyes away from Master Claudius’ hand, now busy between the lips of Vi’s labia.

At the back of the group, in a large, armless chair, Reggie sat with Kell spread wide over his thighs, his cock out of his trousers and driving up into Kell, who faced forward, her neck arched back as she cried out, over and again, her satiny skin shiny with sweat beneath the bright Dungeon lights.

‘Your friends are reaping their rewards for attending you so diligently tonight,’ Severus said. ‘Do you think they’ll get to come many times tonight?’ His hands stilled in her hair.

Hermione did not need his verbal instruction to know it was time to drape herself over his lap, her bottom upturned and ready. He settled her with a practiced motion, and the bristles of her hairbrush scraped lightly down from the small of her back to her upper thighs, then he turned it over and slid it up over her arse crack, the smooth surface cold on her skin.

‘Spread your legs so I can smell you, little slut,’ he said, and Hermione did as he asked with a whimper, his very words like the touch of his hand on her wet nether parts.

Then the first blow of the hairbrush fell on her bottom, hurting so deliciously that she moaned aloud, drawing a smattering of applause from her audience.

‘That’s the way to take a spanking,’ a strange male voice said admiringly, but Hermione scarcely registered it. She was over the knee of the man she wanted for her Master, receiving a spanking with the hairbrush he had given her at the beginning of their relationship, and she might just as easily have been described as being in heaven.

Nothing else mattered to her.

He brought the hairbrush down on her other arse cheek, stinging that translated to pure pleasure in her brain, and she gave herself over to sensation alone. He spanked her with his usual skill, no two blows hitting the same spot consecutively, spreading the impact from right to left, from just below the small of her back, where she received the lightest smacks, to her upper thighs, with the occasional glancing blow to the lips of her cunt. Hermione squirmed beneath this treatment, crying by the fourth
spank and sobbing outright by the seventh. She wanted him so badly, wanted his cock in her body, her nipples as hard as stones upon her chest, her quim so wet that she was slick between her thighs.

She was beyond the ability to speak when he turned her, cradling her back with his right arm, the weave of his trousers rough and scratchy beneath her sore buttocks. ‘Feet flat on the sofa, Hermione,’ he ordered her, and she obeyed, resisting the urge to grab him and rub herself on him until she climaxed. ‘Good girl,’ he praised as she positioned her feet. ‘Now open your legs wide—I’m going to make you come.’

Hermione allowed her thighs to fall open wide, lifting her head from its slump against his shoulder and staring through tear-flooded eyes at her quim, waiting for him to begin to finger her—would she immediately orgasm? And then his left arm rose and the back of the hairbrush impacted her swollen, juice-soaked cunt, creating a loud *squelching* noise. Hermione jerked nearly upright in his lap, a scream torn from her throat, and the orgasm ripped through her behind the pain, roaring along nerve endings which had not forgotten how to respond to the unpredictable Severus Snape.

She heard the spontaneous applause and calls of appreciation and encouragement with which the spectators greeted her orgasm, but she was indifferent to it. The only things that mattered to her were the arms wrapping her up, the face buried in her wild hair—which was quickly reverting to its natural state, the effects of the Sleekeazy’s Hair Potion negated—and the soothing, praising murmurs uttered into her ear. Hermione clung to Severus Snape, her body shaking with reaction, and then his lips were on her cheeks, and the orgasms ripped through her behind the pain, roaring along nerve endings which had not forgotten how to respond to the unpredictable Severus Snape.

And tears were leaking from her eyes again, even as she twined her fingers in his hair, opening her mouth to his aggressively invading tongue, kissed by the man she loved and accepting his kiss with a full and happy heart for the first time in over a year. He pulled her tighter to him, her breasts flattened against his chest, one hand wrapped in the hair at her nape, the other on her hip, holding her in place above the hardening length in his trousers. Suddenly voracious, Hermione twisted in his lap, straddling his hips, her lips closing greedily around his tongue even as she rubbed her bare cunt on his trousers front.

He released her mouth, kissing her throat and marking her with a sucking love bite before his lips were at her ear. ‘What do you want, nasty little girl?’ he taunted, palming the globes of her arse and thrusting up against her.

Hermione moaned and squirmed. ‘Fuck me,’ she begged him shamelessly.

‘Give me your breasts,’ he replied, clearly as lost as she in the moment. ‘Arch your back—put them in my face.’

And cupping her breasts in her own hands, Hermione arched her back and raised them to her lover’s face, pressing them together. Severus groaned aloud, his tongue out and laving her nipple, then slurping directly across to repeat the process on the other, his head moving from side to side, from nipple to nipple. Then his fingers dipped between their bodies, sliding between her labia from above, gliding over the swollen nub of her clitoris. Hermione’s hips jerked convulsively at the combined sensations, his mouth on her nipples, his fingers on her clitoris, his straining erection beneath her bum. Dimly, she was aware of the sounds of the spectators at her back, some of whom were chatting amongst themselves, some of whom were otherwise occupied with the partners of their choice, but beneath her wondering eyes was the gleaming, raven’s wing blue-black of Severus’ hair, swaying with his movements from breast to breast, now suckling, now licking, now biting, now sucking the milky skin beside her nipple between his teeth and marking her with deep purple love bites. And all the time, his fingers on her clitoris, rubbing in precisely the right way. Far too soon, she was
beginning to crest, and he was speaking to her, his voice muffled between her breasts.

‘Come, beautiful girl,’ he murmured. ‘Come when you will—come when you can—come as often as you like, upon your whim, for tonight is your night—and you have never been so beautiful to me as you are right now, taking your pleasure in full view of all these people.’

And Hermione shuddered into climax again, reminded of her audience and violently shamed—and thrilled—that she was rutting like a cat in heat for the entertainment of a roomful of people who were aroused by her actions. And she knew that many of them would fuck their partners or themselves tonight, remembering how she had looked and what she had done before them with Severus tonight.

She slowed, then sagged against Severus, and he brought his fingers to her mouth, fingers slick and smelling of Hermione’s own juices. Without being told, she took the fingers into her mouth past the second knuckle, sucking them clean, and he ran a soothing hand down her spine as she did it, crooning into her ear, ‘Such a perfect little slut—she knows exactly what to do …’

And he pulled her hand away from her mouth and kissed her, sucking each of her lips in turn, then sucking on her tongue, as if he were seeking from her mouth the taste of her quim. Hermione tightened her legs about his hips, grinding against his cock, but he urged her to the side, where she settled on the sofa, her cheek upon his chest, her eyes taking in the actions of the group of watchers … and participators. She saw that both t and Kell were on their knees on the Dungeon floor, sucking enthusiastically on their Master’s cocks, whereas Vi was now astride Claudius, slowly riding her husband’s cock. Hermione started to look away, but Severus forestalled her again.

‘Don’t turn your eyes away from them,’ he said sounding slightly winded, as if he had run along distance. ‘This is a tribute to you, Hermione. Have you ever seen any of them fuck in public before?’

‘No,’ she admitted, watching now with frank interest as Vi rose, the muscles in her thighs flexing below her perfectly smooth back, and beneath her rising bum, the thick, glistening cock of Master Claudius.

‘Would you do something for someone else—a bit of a thank you?’

She tore her eyes away from Claudius and Vi, a frown between her brows. ‘Do what? For whom?’

He cupped her chin, as if to prevent her escape, and he placed his lips to her ear, speaking distinctly but very softly. When he was done, he raised his head, and she looked at him, biting her lower lip.

‘I don’t know if I can,’ she said honestly.

‘Does it repulse you?’ he asked calmly.

Hermione considered this. ‘No,’ she said, ‘but I feel shy—I wouldn’t know how to … approach it.’

He tucked hair behind her ear. ‘I can assure you that it would be eagerly welcomed by the recipients—and I will come with you and assist.’

She offered her hand, and he took it. They stood and walked down the steps of the platform, Severus in the lead. There was a smattering of applause from watchers who were not otherwise occupied. Hermione’s heart was crashing about in her chest, but at the same time, she felt sure that Severus was right—the overture would be accepted and welcomed, and it would be a fitting tribute.

They walked until they stood at the sofa where Claudius and Vi coupled, intent now upon one
another—but Claudius looked up when Severus and Hermione stopped beside them, and his hand upon Vi’s hip stilled her motion.

‘Might Hermione provide some … assistance?’ Severus asked, his tone deferential as he addressed the other Dominant.

‘If it is her choice to do so,’ Claudius said with a faint look of puzzlement. ‘Hermione?’

Hermione leaned forward and kissed Vi’s cheek. When Vi turned her wondering blue eyes on Hermione, Hermione kissed her friend’s mouth for the second time that night, then knelt on the sofa beside Claudius and kissed his lips as well. ‘Thank you,’ she said into his ear.

And Severus, true to his word, stepped behind Violet and placed hands upon her shoulders, urging her to change her position and bracing to provide her a secure anchor. As Vi leaned back and resumed her movements, Severus assisting, Hermione lowered her face to the place where her mentor’s body joined that of her training Dominant, and her tongue darted out, tasting the base of Claudius’ cock, slicked with Vi’s secretions. It was salty, slightly alien in flavour, but not unpleasant, and she hummed, turning her face and laving the swollen, parted lips of Vi’s quim, drawing a quivering murmur from Vi. Claudius uttered a guttural groan when Vi shuddered on his cock, and one of his hands descended to stroke Hermione’s head, lightly lacing in her loose hair.

With the angle between their torsos widened sufficiently, Hermione was easily able to kiss, lick, and suckle them both, their sounds of pleasure and frequent repetitions of her name all the encouragement she needed to continue, wrapping her lips around the root of Claudius’s penis, rising from a thatch of golden pubic hair, then turning her face to drag her tongue between Vi’s labia lips, soon bringing her hands forward, seeking and finding Vi’s clitoris with no trouble and applying a stroking finger to it. She was rewarded for her effort by her friend’s screaming cry, followed by a mighty thrust from Claudius, his fingers convulsing in Hermione’s hair as he emptied himself in his wife, their joining completed by the contributions of the girl who had lately worn their training collar—the girl who loved them both.

And Vi leaned forward to kiss Claudius, then Hermione, then Claudius again, who kissed his wife very thoroughly, then kissed Hermione with perhaps as much tenderness and passion as he felt she could accept from him, his tongue sliding against hers for only an instant before he ended the kiss, cradling her face to kiss each of her closed eyes before releasing her.

And Severus lifted her from the sofa and kissed her mouth greedily, his own arousal radiating from him in waves, washing over her. Hermione felt as if she had climbed Mount Everest, stepping outside of herself and thinking only of Claudius and Vi, giving to them what they wanted from her in that moment. She was aware that this last demonstration had drawn more interest from the people present in the Dungeon than anything else that had taken place that night. From the murmurs she heard, it seemed that though threesomes weren’t particularly uncommon, having the Claudius family make a public demonstration was rare, indeed.

Severus released her, looking down into her eyes, and for the first time in what seemed like forever, he spoke in her mind.

And now?

*Please take me away—I want to be alone with you.*

Taking her hand, he spoke to Claudius, who was murmuring quietly with Vi, his hand running up and down her spine, up and down.
‘Hermione wishes to come away with me, Claudius,’ Severus said quietly. ‘Do you have any objection?’

‘No objections—only the reservations of any Master releasing a trainee,’ Claudius replied evenly, his calming ministrations to his wife never ceasing.

And Severus inclined his head respectfully. ‘Understood,’ he said, and with that, Claudius seemed to be content.

Next Severus looked about the room until he saw Hadrian, standing beside Elinore’s chair, just beyond the crowd. Gathering Hermione to him with a strong, possessive arm, he led her to the older couple.

‘Hermione wishes to be alone with me,’ he said to Hadrian, and something seemed to pass between them.

Hermione looked between the two wizards, wondering what she had missed.

Hadrian smiled warmly at Hermione, then nodded once to Severus. Elinore squeezed Hermione’s hand quickly. ‘Lovely debut, dear,’ she said warmly.

‘Are you ready?’ Severus asked Hermione. She glanced over her shoulder, seeing each of her three friends curled up in the arms of their Dominants, and fiercely, she wished to emulate them.

‘I’m beyond ready,’ she averred, and before she could speak another word, he wrapped her in his arms and Disapparated.

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