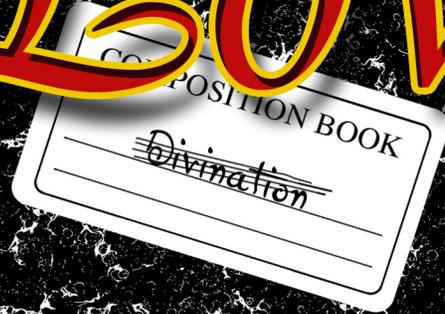


Love's



Appalling

Adverbs



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Love's Appalling Adverbs

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Author's Notes:

Oh, we've all been there. Crushes on teachers and bad fiction both. Thanks as always to Sobriquet for the beta, and feedback shamelessly begged for!

LUCIUS, I TOLD YOU NEVER TO CALL ME
WHEN I'M WORKING!"
"This can't wait."

Snape glared at the image of Lucius Malfoy in the fireplace flames. "What, precisely, is so pressing that you are contacting me in my classroom during the day, you fool? Anyone could have been in here!"

"Severus, I do know your schedule. You're between classes right now. Do shut up and just listen."

"And if I'd had a student in here serving detention?"

The image smiled. "Well, then I suppose you'd just have had to kill them, wouldn't you?"

Severus Snape was at least pleased that he was already furious, because he didn't have to hide his fury at that statement as well. This had to stop. He was going to have to tell Dumbledore that he could not stand this for one day longer.

"What the hell do you want, Lucius?"

"Pettigrew will be there tonight. He will meet you in the usual place."

Snape rolled his eyes. "Tonight? What is it now, a plan

to poison the Muggle water supply? Planting incriminating sex photos in Dumbledore's bedroom? More fiendish plots to do away with The Boy Who Lived Despite Our Best Efforts Which Are Obviously Rather Pathetic?"

"Are you quite finished?"

"I will be if you ever contact me outside of my own quarters again, Lucius! Voldemort will lose his Hogwarts contact, and then he will be pissed at both of us, or are you too thick to grasp that?"

"Severus, you are far too afraid —"

The door to the classroom clicked open behind Snape.

Snape didn't even look to see who it was. He grabbed the first non-inflammable liquid off his desk that came to hand — fortunately he kept both a pitcher of water and a box of sand on his desk at all times, students' experiment results being about as predictable as a bagful of skrewts — and threw the contents on the fire.

He had the brief satisfaction of watching Lucius's face melt like a Muggle version of a Wicked Witch just before he spun to face the door.

It was the Granger girl, hand still on the doorknob, looking at him with very startled eyes.

Had she seen anything other than him dousing the fireplace?

"Um —" She was looking past him at the steaming logs.

He made a point of casting a casual glance at it as he folded his arms. "I thought the chimney was catching. What is it, Miss Granger?"

"I — I, um, just forgot my box of newt's claws, Professor..."

"Well, get it and go." He turned away, knowing that it would look suspicious if he watched her too closely. Or perhaps not. All the students were used to him glar-

ing at them.

He heard her footsteps going to her desk, and then going to the door. But they stopped there.

"Professor —?" she said, the questioning tone almost timid.

"Yes?" He hadn't meant to swoop so, in turning around, but he really wanted her gone.

She was hastily transferring her gaze from the fireplace back to him. "I — it can wait."

She fled. That was the only word for it.

Snape crossed to the door and closed it before returning to his desk and sinking into his chair. If she *had* seen anything...

It was Miss Granger, who was clever, and that was bad. But it was Miss Granger, who was ready to think the best of everyone, and that was good.

Good enough, he hoped.



Hermione couldn't pay attention to what Ron was saying. She murmured "Whatever..." and pushed at her Yorkshire pudding with a fork.

"Hermione, you trying to eat that or deflate it?" said Harry, across from her.

She barely heard him. Who had Professor Snape been talking to that he'd had to quench the fire altogether when she walked in?

She told herself not to be so suspicious. It could have been a sweetheart. (The image of Snape having a sweetheart was disturbing enough.) It could have been his mother. (The image of Snape having a *mother* was even more disturbing, oddly.)

It didn't mean something...dark was going on.

She couldn't tell Harry or Ron. They'd be all over the idea: "Oh, he must be in cahoots with Voldemort! I always knew it, the slimy git!"

Though she couldn't actually hear either one of them using the word *cahoots*.

No, she couldn't expect either one of them to help her figure this one out with any kind of reasonable perspective.

Should she go to Professor McGonagall?

Go to McGonagall with *what*, precisely? She'd raise her eyebrows and tell Hermione that putting out fires was hardly evidence of mischief, indeed quite the contrary, and what exactly should she do about it? All right, maybe not that patronizing, but she just didn't have anything *solid*.

"...told him that Ravenclaw didn't have a chance with two Chasers out, and he said something about looking up spells to make it rain, and apparently Hermione's communicating with the mothership, *hello*, Hermione?"

"Give it a rest, Ron, she's still not listening. Probably trying to transfigure her fork into a peacock."

She'd just have to wait and see if anything else suspicious turned up.

Or maybe... maybe she shouldn't just *wait*.



He hated dealing with Pettigrew even more than with Lucius. At least Lucius gave him the opportunity for an exchange of insults. Pettigrew was too much of a whiny little boot-licker to insult. No fun kicking a man when he was already down.

He locked the door to his quarters and headed for the North Corridor.

Pettigrew was already there, hiding in the meeting room as a rat. Once Snape arrived, he shifted back to human form (not an improvement, in Snape's opinion) and immediately began prattling on about the alliance that was underway with the Serpentia and the role that Voldemort wanted Snape to play in the negotiations. Snape listened because he had to and tried to not to seethe too visibly at the prospect of playing diplomat to a faction whose language he didn't even speak. Brewing translation potions was an annoying prospect; magpie's tongues were hard to come by.

When he allowed himself to admit it, he knew he was actually very well suited for this type of deception. Perpetually Vexed was his baseline; none of Voldemort's minions, or even Voldemort himself ever tried to read him for reactions of distaste when his loyalties were tested. He always acted like he found everything distasteful.

Pettigrew stopped in mid-sentence. "D'you hear that?"

Snape listened, rather than saying "What?" as most idiots would.

Pettigrew said, "That should be MacNair. I'm not sure he knows which room —"

"MacNair's *here*?"

"Yes. Didn't Malfoy tell you he was coming?"

Snape kept his fuming internal as he listened: yes, he thought he heard a step outside.

"You should go get him, Severus. I don't want to risk being seen."

It was easier to do it than argue.

Snape opened the door and stepped into the hallway. No one was in sight but, yes, he heard footsteps just around the corner.

Tentative footsteps. Something wasn't right here...

And then someone stepped around the corner.

Not MacNair. Definitely not MacNair.

It was the Granger girl.

Bloody fucking *hell*. She'd... *followed* him!

They were almost face to face. Her eyes widened.

In that moment, Snape was aware of three things: one, she was opening her mouth to say something; two, there was *another* set of footsteps audible from around the corner, and these were *not* tentative...

And three, the door to another room was not five paces away.

He got his hand over her mouth first. Miracle of miracles, she jerked and tried to pull away but she didn't make a sound as he dragged her toward the door.

Despite the need for haste, and the fact that he was struggling with someone who very much didn't want to go with him through that door, he got it opened and clicked shut behind him with a minimum of noise, one hand on Hermione's mouth, the other on the back of her head. He was even able to hear how the footsteps were getting louder.

What they'd stepped into wasn't another room exactly. It was not much bigger than a closet.

Which was lined with weapons: swords, daggers, axes, all stocked on the walls. *Hell*. If the girl decided to grab one of those...!

She squeaked under his hand. Not loud. It might not have been heard.

The footsteps came to a stop just outside the door. Or maybe it *had* been.

He looked at the girl in the dim light filtering through the cracks in the door. Her eyes weren't on his, however. She was looking at the wall to his right.

He glanced over. Oh, for fuck's sake. That particular wall was lined, not with weapons, but a rather impressive assortment of torture implements: pincers, manacles, tongs, spiky looking things whose purpose he uncomfortably had to admit he recognized.

He had the sinking feeling that if he asked himself if it could get any worse, it would.

He gave the girl a little shake; it got her eyes on him. He didn't dare even whisper; not now, with someone just outside the door who presumably could be —

"MacNair?"

It was Pettigrew's voice. Both he and Hermione looked at the closed door.

"Wormtail. There you are." Snape felt the girl jerk as she heard the name.

"Where's Severus?"

"I haven't seen him. I just arrived —"

"No, I mean he was just here. I thought —"

He felt them looking about as their voices trailed off. They'd look at the door and put it together any moment.

He could fix this. He gave the girl the hardest look he could as he took his hand away from her mouth — her eyes were *huge* — and reached for his wand.

"He couldn't have gone far..." A footstep.

Snape aimed the wand at the door and said, as softly as he could to cast it, "*Obfuscate*."

There was a sizzle.

Then: "There you are, Wormtail."

"Oh — yes, I was looking for you. Severus should be here soon. Come in here; he knows this room, and we won't be seen."

Footsteps and a door shutting.

As quietly as possible, Snape whispered, "You idiot girl."

"I —"

"If they had seen you, they would have *killed* you. And I would have had to let them do it, or break my cover. You *idiot*. What did you think you were doing?"

She sucked in her lower lip and he could see the tears starting. He gave her another shake. "Voldemort won't check for Obfuscation like he would a stronger memory charm. But now I have to go in and listen to Pettigrew babble the whole plan *again*. I'm *not* happy about that."

He let her go. "You wait a few seconds after I go in there before you leave this storeroom and get away from here. I'll make some noise to cover it. I'd Oblivate you, you stupid girl, but I want you running back to your dormitory like a terrified ferret, which, incidentally, has a greater sense of self-preservation than you." *And I hate using memory charms on anyone not truly despicable*, he thought but didn't say, remembering something from his own past that had pissed him off royally when he'd learned the truth. *I hate having principles*.

"Your dormitory. And *stay* there. You understand?"

She nodded, gulped down her tears.

He put his hand on the doorknob, looked back at her. Dammit, memory charm would have been so bloody convenient.

"I never want to hear a single question from you about

this, in the future. If you find yourself overwhelmed with the need to ask anyone, then for god's sake, *please* make sure it is Dumbledore and no other."

He opened the door, shut it behind him, and walked to the room across the hall without looking behind him.

"Ah, there you are, Severus."



Hermione walked away from the stone gargoyle outside Professor Dumbledore's office and tried to process everything she'd just heard from the Headmaster.

Professor Snape was a *double agent*. Everything he'd implied last night was completely true; Dumbledore had backed up his story, clearly not happy that she'd stumbled upon the fact, but quick to defend Snape. His work with the Death Eaters as their Hogwarts spy meant that Dumbledore had first-hand knowledge of Voldemort's plans. And he'd *been* a Death Eater, once; Dumbledore had told her of the Dark Mark Snape bore on his left arm, symbol of his shadowed and now-repentant past.

It was almost too much to believe.

She tried to picture Snape in a tuxedo and brandishing a Walther PPK at a bloody silhouette of a eye and had to smother a laugh with her palm. (The gargoyle gave her a strange look.)

Harry and Ron would never believe it. Not that it was an issue; Dumbledore had sworn her to secrecy. Unnecessarily; she knew perfectly well that she wasn't to tell anyone. And she wouldn't.

It would be *her* secret. She hugged herself a little.

Well... hers and Snape's.

Good god, how could she face him in Potions later that day?

Well, she'd face him quite normally, after all. That was what was required of her. She'd show him that he had nothing to worry about. That she could keep a secret very well. Just like him.

That she had courage, just like him.

God, did he have courage.



Watching him curse out Neville in class for using shredded slugs in place of shrivelfigs ("Weren't you *listening*, Longbottom? That is the poorest excuse for an Embalming Solution I have had the displeasure of viewing in all my years as a teacher. Five points from Gryffindor"), Hermione was having revelations she'd never dreamed of. Snape was in the midst of terrible danger every day, just by being Dumbledore's spy, yet he carried on daily without the merest alteration of his demeanor.

No, she really couldn't see him in a tuxedo. Black robes suited him very well.

She watched as he plucked a Sugar Quill out of Pansy Parkinson's hand ("I can think of a few things less wise than sucking on the end of a sweet in *Potions* class, in extreme proximity to noxious, not to mention deadly, ingredients, Miss Parkinson, but not many"), paying attention to the dexterity of his fingers, the efficient way he acted with the least amount of movement. She could still feel his hand over her mouth.

Firm yet not hurting her and brooking no argument.

He was starting to turn in her direction. Hastily she bent

her head to her cauldron, pretending to be absorbed in stirring. As soon as he'd looked past, however, she sneaked another look.

She watched as he folded his arms, viewing Parvati's efforts ("So you aren't deaf after all, Miss Patil. That even looks the proper shade of green, for once").

Ooh. She'd never noticed what impressive shoulders he had.



She was supposed to be doing her Herbology homework, but her mind wouldn't stay on the text. Instead of seeing the lines on the care of Festering Ficus plants, she kept seeing Snape's eyes on hers in the dim light of the storeroom.

She'd never been so near to him before.

What had he smelled like? She couldn't recall the scent of anything like cologne, but the simple proximity meant she could notice the smell of his clothing; she thought about it and was sure she could reconstruct it, over the smell of the laundry freshener that the house-elves used on everything at Hogwarts. Something masculine, like... patchouli, or sandalwood.

Something shifted around in her head.

She closed the Herbology text, trying to form something out of the pieces that were trying to fit themselves together.

She went to the stack of books at her side and pulled out her Divination notebook. Since she never wrote down anything Professor Trelawney said, it was effectively blank.

Taking her quill, she wrote:

Her eyes opened wide as she rounded the corner.

She had been following him

She crossed out *him* and wrote:

the man

Better. She liked the way that sounded; it gave her a nice shivery feeling

for

a while? that evening?

long minutes

Ooh, good

through the corridors, determined to find out just what he

She crossed out *he*.

dark intentions he

planned? was up to?

purposed

Mmm, yes! This was fun!

here in this supposedly

protected haven. Yet

Oh, she was going to have to name herself. Well...

Heloise Gramarye could not let anyone threaten the safety of her beloved school and all

its charges. Even at the cost of her own safety!

She'd always liked the name Heloise. And Gramarye meant witchcraft, so that was rather clever too!

But finding him there, staring straight at her, his own eyes wide with shock at seeing her appear so abruptly, realizing the girl

She crossed out *girl*.

daring girl had been following him all along,

She sucked the end of her quill for a minute before continuing:

Stavros Sableheart

She sighed. Yes, that was exactly right.

was a sight to make her heart pound more wildly than it ever had before.

The sound of footsteps!

Heloise threw a glance over her shoulder, her mane of chestnut curls just brushing her cheek, but suddenly Stavros had

No, she wouldn't be calling him by his first name just yet, would she?

Sableheart had seized her arm, his grip almost cruel,

dragging her forward. "You mad fool!" he hissed threateningly.

She opened her mouth to tell him that all was not as it seemed, that her reasons for being there were utterly innocent, something, anything to deceive him and make him let her go! But suddenly his hand was upon her mouth, crushing back anything she might have said, nearly bruising her rose petal-soft lips as his other arm twined around her slender waist, pulling her against his firm chest, where she could feel that his heart was beating as wildly as her own.

She almost swooned with the feeling of his strong body against hers.

Then, as she realized, with new terror, that the footsteps behind her were becoming louder, and louder (but surely not as loud as the twined beating of their hearts!),

She did a little wriggle in her chair. Oh, *that was nice!*

Stavros looked in the direction of their approach, his face twisted with anger and desperation, and abruptly wrenched Afeloise off her feet, dragging her towards...

The door! What lay behind it, what?

She knew with dreadful

No...

deadly certainty that she was about to find out, even as she moaned her protest into Sableheart's palm, tight over her lips as he flung the door open and hauled her desperately struggling form along with him into the tiny enclosure beyond.

Desperately she tried to prevent him from closing

Hang on, she'd just used *desperately* or some form of it three times on the last page.

Oh, she'd clean it up later. Actually, it kind of sounded good. Emphatic.

the door behind them, but she was no match for his superior strength, clasped to his black-clad figure like something dear (oh, if only!) as he pulled the door shut. The click was whisper-quiet in reality, but was the BOOM of a death knell in her heart.

He pressed her against the wall with the pressure of his hand on her mouth, and then with the pressure of his body on hers, hard and lean and with the male smell of him filling her senses like the headiest champagne. His ebony-black eyes bored into her own emerald ones.

"Not a sound," he hissed vehemently, "if you value either

of our lives!"

Outside she heard the ominous footsteps of the Enemy.

Okay, now who was the enemy going to be?

Eh. She didn't care. She'd work on that later. She wanted to get to the Good Parts.

They hesitated briefly before moving past purposefully.

Sableheart's eyes kept looking into hers with that dark fire of tumultuous emotion. Heloise could feel herself shaking as it all started to fall into place. Dear lord...he was protecting her! Stavros Sableheart was not the enemy after all!

And her heart leapt with joy as the blessed knowledge came crashing down on her.

"HerMione... I said, we're leaving now, are you in there, Hermione?"

"Forget it, Ron, she's in her element. Trying to get Hermione to leave the library is like trying to get Hagrid to leave a convention of werewumpas... Hermione, what are you writing?"

She emerged from her single-minded efforts just far enough to say, "Nothing. Go away. I'll be here a while."

"Madame Pince'll kick her out when it closes. Come on, Ron. I'll let you beat me in chess in the common room."

Hermione didn't even look up as they left.



"It looks," Sableheart growled impatiently, "like we will be here for a while."

Heloise looked at him soulfully. "I'm so sorry, sir. I never meant..." she whispered tearfully, unable to complete the sentence.

The man's eyes softened, taking in the sight of her crystal tears, sliding down those damask cheeks. His hand, which had been such a weapon of fierce terror bare moments ago, now rose to caress that cheek, gently, wiping away one glistening drop. "Well, dear girl, I suppose your intentions were good. It's not your fault."

"But it is!" Heloise gasped contritely. "I've put you in danger! I never meant— oh, if only I had known!!!"

She ducked her face back toward her shoulder abruptly, trying to hide the fresh burst of tears.

His fingers, still gentle, now took a hold of her chin and turned her face back to his. "Ssh, don't cry, my dear. You are... so very brave, you know. If only I had had one-tenth your courage when I was your age... ah,

the things I could have done, could have withstood! So many mistakes I would not have made..."

She let her trembling fingers touch his arm. "But you are...not so very much older than I."

A wry twist of the mouth took possession of Sableheart's face. "You are but a slip of a girl."

Her hand on his arm grasped more fiercely. "No... no, I am not! I am a woman, Professor Sableheart! Student I may be, but I am not a mere girl! Oh..." She pulled her face away again miserably. "Is that all I am to you?" she whispered hopelessly. "Just a silly, foolish girl? Is that all I ever shall be to you?"

And his fingers touched her chin again tentatively, forcing her face, blinded by her tears, to look at him again. "Ah, Heloise. If only I could tell you what is in my inmost heart."

Rapidly she blinked away her tears, suddenly finding her courage again in that one short revelation. "Then tell me. Oh, Professor - Stavros, please, I beg of you, tell me!"

Had she gone too far? She saw his expression when she spoke his given name; had it been - anger? Dis-

pleasure? No! It was...

RAPTURE.

Okay, Hermione thought. Who was going to kiss who first here?

"Heloise..." he murmured in a strangled voice. "I... no, you do not know what you ask...you cannot know...!"

Hm. At this rate it was going to have to be her. She'd have to give her Snape some motivation.

"But I do!" she whispered fervently. Daring everything, taking the greatest risk she had ever taken, summoning all the courage from her depths, she placed her hands behind his neck, clasping his hair

Could you clasp hair?

, his shoulders in her two hands, so that he could not possibly mistake her meaning. "Oh, Stavros, tell me, dear, dear Stavros!"

There. Plenty of motivation but not so slutty as to be the first one kissing.

Sableheart groaned. "Dearest Heloise...!" he sighed shakily, her name on his lips the sweetest sound she had ever heard, as he leaned forward as if under some alien

power that he had no hope of resisting, an alien power named The Truest Love For Hfeloise Gramarye, and placed his lips on hers, softly at first, then with greater and greater power until the kiss was a thing of passion, a meeting of two true hearts, a moment in time that neither of them could ever, ever deny had occurred...

The most wonderful moment of her young (young? No, not so young, not so young as Stavros would have it) life.

In fact, in his arms she was truly ageless.

Her knees buckled inescapably and Stavros caught her in his strong arms, pulling her boldly to his black-robed chest and supporting her fainting form.

Was he saying her name enough? She wanted to make sure that the delicious feeling of that came through.

"Hfeloise, my sweet... dearest Hfeloise!" he murmured softly, gathering her to him and kissing her mouth again, her chin, her face, her eyes, her forehead, her hair, her neck, as she cried out softly, a sound that wanted to be his name but she no longer possessed the ability to form words, as she prayed that her lack of resistance would tell him everything she could not tell him with her voice -

"Miss Granger, are you paying attention?"

Hermione started guiltily. "I'm sorry, Professor McGonagall. Yes, Professor."

She shut the notebook and tried to focus on the Transfiguration lesson.

Ron looked at Harry and made a small, quick *whooshing* gesture with his palm over his head. Harry bit his lips to diminish his grin.

Hermione saw it but didn't respond. She was thinking about the complexities of getting one's robes off in a small storeroom.



On her bed, Hermione clutched the notebook to her chest and stewed even deeper into her internal agony.

Was she really going to *write* that?

Did she have the nerve?

It was hard enough just to *think* it.

She squeezed her eyes shut and remembered the smell of Snape's skin. To have had his hand move away from her mouth and down to the collar of her robes, to the buttons on her blouse, opening them...

He could have done anything he wanted to her, there in that storeroom...

She was filled with the overwhelming need to touch herself.

Instead, she opened the notebook and did something much, much dirtier.

The quill kept slipping in her sweaty fingers.

"I cannot stop myself," Stavros breathed huskily.

"Dear Lord, help me, but I cannot stop myself. Hfeloise

- forgive me...!"

She arched against him needily, thanking whatever gods there were for his sudden loss of the iron control that made him the man she had so completely fallen for, for she wanted now to see that vulnerability that would truly show him as all too human, as a man, and not merely as a hero.

She should stop him if he could not stop himself, she knew. Yet she did not possess the ability to do that either.

"I do, Starros," she wept softly, but with joy, not with fear. "I do forgive you. I forgive you now, and for everything, ever. I'm - not afraid."

"I - I don't want to hurt you," he murmured miserably, his hands cupped gently around her chin, staring into her viridian eyes.

She turned her head to the side and kissed his strong fingers. "You could never hurt me," she whispered huskily.

He crushed her to him again hungrily, kissing her like their very lives depended on him showing her how much he loved her, and then pulled away only far enough to begin untying the silken ribbon at her throat. Her robes fell to the floor as if they had a will of their own. She stood

before him, clad in the clothing that might have belonged to a student but that showed that she was no longer a mere girl, but a woman, with a woman's curves outlined within the vestments of her station.

It completely removed any last vestiges of his will to resist. He had her top unbuttoned within moments, and pressed his face to her bosom.

She crossed out the last three words. Dammit. That wasn't strong enough.

Yes, but it was so... embarrassing.

Was this a romance or not? she told herself severely.

between her bared breasts, breathing in the divine scent of her skin, murmuring, "Heloise...", daring to turn his face to kiss the side of her alabaster breast. She thought she would die in the ecstasy of it, her fingers twining into his hair, and he looked up as though she might be trying to pull him away, but seeing what he saw in her face, his own was transformed with such bliss that it hurt her heart to see it.

She fell back against the wall as his hands, on fire with new purpose, slid to her tiny waist and found the fastening to her skirt. She gasped at the overwhelming reality

of what he was doing, yet he silenced her with another kiss, ready to take what he could not resist, and she was glad of it, glad that he was who he was, not someone who would have asked further questions or begged her pardon for doing this, any more than he already had. For if she were asked again if she wanted this, she would not have been able to give her permission.

She so fiercely wanted this taken from her without it!!!

His night-dark hair under her fingers was further testament to the reality of him. This was truly her Stavros, not some dream.

And her not-dream Stavros had unfastened her skirt, yet prior to divesting her of it, he had reached under it and

Oof. How did she refer to those? She rejected four all-too jarring options before writing:

slid her undergarments free, and, in drawing them down,

Yes, they were in a storeroom, but she wasn't going to be naked in nothing but shoes and socks, it wasn't *romantic!*

removed her footwear as well before letting her skirt fall, denuding her altogether.

Heloise turned her face away shyly. No man had ever looked upon her like this before; she could not resist modestly covering her bared breasts with her hands. But Stavros gently but firmly took a hold of her wrists and drew them deliberately down to her sides. "I want to look at you," he sighed passionately. "You are so...so beautiful, Heloise..."

Passion made him hasty as he removed his own clothing. Still painfully shy, she kept her face averted bashfully as one by one, his garments joined hers in a carelessly-strewn pile that was a testament to the depth of their passion

She was overusing a word again. Later. Fix it later.

, and this time, when his slender, strong fingers turned her face back to his, she did not resist, could not resist, did not want to resist.

She knew what he was seeing as he looked up and down her naked body

Hermione bit her lip, but made herself go on:

, the perfect round breasts, capped sweetly with perfect coral tips, the slenderness of her ribs

and belly suddenly flaring out into the womanly roundness of her hips, the

Oh god.

secret, curled fleece that so protectively concealed the treasures between her silken thighs... from the top of her head with its sorrel tresses cascading, to the tips of her girlish toes, she knew she must be a sight to make any man hungry.

But Stavros was not just any man. He was the only one who mattered. Would he find her... wanting?

His answer came as he slid to his knees and kissed her belly. "Beautiful, beautiful girl..." he whispered devotedly. "My beautiful girl..."

She gasped in the ecstasy of his words, blissfully murmuring back, "Stavros..." as her beloved, ebony-haired and-eyed professor (ah! there was so much she had always, always wanted to learn from him!) rose to his feet again, gathering her to him boldly, and she felt what it was like to have a man's skin upon hers, warm and alive and so very, very real, and it was better than all the dreams that had ever been.

His chest against hers, the muscles there so strong and firm, made her want to bury her face against it as well, and when he lifted his fingers to her face once again, stroking her hair back purposefully so that the full beauty of her eyes could not be hidden from him, she glimpsed it: there, on the inside of his arm: the mark of the Enemy. Cruel indelible stain of his youthful folly! Now it was his talisman, for without it, he could never have been trusted by those he would betray, and betray, and betray.

And send to their very doom.

The tears sprang into Heloise's eyes once more. Now she had his hand in hers, bringing the terrible token of the burden he carried so nobly to her lips. "How - how you have been hurt - oh, my dearest -" She kissed the mark tenderly, as though she could heal it with the power of her kiss, her glass-green eyes never leaving his.

She saw how his eyes softened. "It does not matter." He pulled his arm away so that he could kiss her lips again softly. "I feel as though no one could ever hurt me again, Heloise, now that I have told you how I feel. And that I am... not unfavorable in your eyes as well."

Oh, but she had to tell him! Afraid to say the words...

But he silenced her with a finger on her lips, as though he knew what she would say and could not bear to have her commit herself so, as though he were not worthy of such an honor.

His mouth sought the side of her slim white throat, and then her shoulder, drawing her even closer as he did so, and she could feel in his kisses, in his arms, how his arousal was heightening; and not only that, but now she could not ignore the almost terrifying yet thrilling feel of his

She shut the notebook and moaned into her pillow. She couldn't.

Was she going to stop now?

No, she damn well wasn't.

She opened the book again, snapped it shut again with another groan, but then forced it open to the page she'd been on. She wrote and crossed out *member*, wrote and crossed out *phallus*, wrote and crossed out *organ* before she finally wrote:

manhood pressing against her belly, roused to readiness by the sweetness and proximity of her. The feeling made her gasp fearfully; she had to draw away to look down and see it; it was impossibly HUGE, it would never, never fit inside the intended location...

But she trusted him, did she not?

"Look at me," he murmured throatily, and though she was, she knew he meant his face, and she looked up hesitantly, trying to keep her lip from trembling.

"You are mine, do you understand me?" he whispered fiercely

Hermione made a little mewl.

, his breath like kisses on her face. "Mine, and no other's."

She nodded rapidly, desperate to assuage the savagery she saw in his eyes. "Yours, I swear, only yours..."

The savagery ameliorated very slightly, but not to become soft, oh no, only to become something wicked and needful, that suited his dark demeanor so well. "I will show you."

He made her spread her legs, there against the wall

Her handwriting was getting worse.

, his hand touching her where only her own hand had touched before, and she moaned as he opened her there as well, one finger stroking as if he knew everything about her, every fantasy and every response and every

part of her flesh, as if all women were exactly the same and he'd known enough of them that she was no different, no different in her skin or her likes or her wants, and she found herself wondering how many other women he had had, for surely for him to be able to drag this response out of her so readily it had to have been dozens, surely not hundreds, but who knew?

Wait a minute, *what* had been the subject of that sentence again? Oh - right...

But what did it matter if she was not the first? She would never desire to be anything but the last.

He pressed his body close to hers.

"You must not cry out," he whispered fervently. "They are still out there."

She nodded understandingly. "I will not."

But then she thought of something.

But then she thought of something. She took his hand in hers, brought it to her lips, but not to kiss; she set it against her mouth firmly, and he understood her, pressing his palm over her mouth and then setting his lips against the back of his hand, his sable eyes

Crap, she couldn't use *sable*. But she didn't want to miss an opportunity to mention his eye color, it was too important to be forgotten!

his Stygian eyes never leaving hers for a moment as he slowly pressed that male part of him against her and into her, and her cry was almost nonexistent as it was absorbed against his palm, and he waited until she was still again before carefully removing his hand and murmuring, "Sweet Afeloise, are you all right? I'm sorry -"

She shook her head, blinking back tears. "No, Stavros. There's nothing to be sorry for. Don't stop, please," she begged fervently.

He pressed his mouth to her shoulder again as he shifted his body inside of hers slightly, then thrust forward again quickly, and Afeloise moaned with pleasure as her fingers found the locks of his smoke-dark hair again, bringing her mouth near to kiss them urgently, and he showed her that he was a man and a hero, yes, both, all at once, the same way that she had fallen in love with both of those things at once, so long ago, in the way that he rode her to pleasure, both his and hers, until

he exploded into her and she into herself, a firework of ecstasy bursting miraculously through her mind in a way that she had never imagined could be so blissful.

She was his and he was hers!

Hermione, in a state of rapture, fell face first over the notebook with a sound like a woman giving birth.

She did not know how apt the metaphor was.

Nor did she know how vehemently any objective critics would have told her that her firstborn deserved swift and painless drowning.



Oh, she could watch him forever.

She bit her lip as his brows drew down in that way that meant something truly had his ire. ("Potter! I said to *splice* the orchid stems, not *slice* them! Get your head off the Quidditch pitch and back into the classroom for once!")

God, he was so *smouldering* when he did that.

("Harry, she's staring off into space again.")

("I know. I'm starting to wonder if she's ill.")

She hid a smile. They couldn't even *conceive* that she might be looking at Snape.

Well, a few days ago, it would have shocked her too.

Oh god — he was coming over to her...!

Damn. Had she been paying close enough attention to the lesson? She'd certainly been paying attention to that rich, sinuous *voice*, but as for what he'd *said*...

He stopped at her desk, leaning over to peer at her cauldron, irascible dark lean judicator of a man that he was, and she felt the pulse pounding in her throat.

Then a slight exhalation, and "Acceptably done, Miss Granger." He was already moving on.

Her eyes shut just a little too long to be a blink. Oh, the way he'd *breathed*...

She wanted to put that into her story, somewhere.

Hermione pulled the notebook out of the pile of texts on the floor, opened it to where she'd left off. Yes, she could work that in here, she thought.

Stavros sighed once, even that slight exhalation rich with emot

Her quill scored a black streak of ink across her desk as the notebook was snatched out from under her hands.

"Hey, Granger, these don't look much like *Potions* notes, do they?" Draco Malfoy leered at her, the open notebook in his grip.

"GIVE me that!" she yelled, lunging for it —

— and Draco jumped back so that she missed completely, upsetting her cauldron so that it splattered blue Essence of Denatured Bergamot onto the floor, blocking her efforts to get to him and prompting him to fall back even farther —

"Let's see: '...with her lips still sweetly pressed to his bare shoulder —' Oh, this looks GOOD, Granger! — she murmured softly, "I will never regret these circumstances, ever —""

OH, MY GOD — ! "GIVE ME THAT, DRACO! STOP IT!" she shrieked, trying to drown him out and drown out the little explosions of giggles that were starting around the classroom, still fighting to get around the mess on the floor to him, but he was weaving between desks, now, still reading aloud as he went —

""— that have brought us together for this first time." "Ah," he replied huskily, kissing her ruby lips, still swollen from his earlier kisses of passion, "but I could have wished that it were under other conditions than this cramped storeroom, with our enemies a hair's breadth away." His pitch-black eyes —"

Noooooooo! "SHUT UP, DRACO!!!"

"MR. MALFOY!"

How Snape's voice cut through her shrieks and Draco's hideously loud singsong recitation she had no idea.

But then, that was the man's gift, wasn't it?

As well as his gift of perception. OH MY GOD HE'D HEARD THE BIT ABOUT THE STOREROOM!

At almost the same moment Draco went down in a flying tackle that was all red hair and freckles, and he lost a hold of the notebook, and it came down into other hands that leapt for it, proving that he was as good with larger objects as he was with the Snitch, and as Draco yelled in protest, trying to protect himself from Ron's fists, and Harry clutched the notebook to his chest and stood there looking about him angrily, daring anyone to try to take it from him, Snape's voice cut through the pandemonium again: "ALL OF YOU!"*

She'd never known that silence... crashed down like that.

She stood there.

Was there anything on her desk that she could swallow and kill herself with right now?

"Miss Granger."

ohgod...

"This is Potions Class, not Salacious Novel Writing 101, I will thank you to remember in the future. Ten points

from Gryffindor for your inattention."

She still couldn't breathe.

"And Mr. Malfoy, that will also be ten points from Slytherin. You are not the designated Overseer of Misbehavior in my class; no one has that distinction except for me."

Draco opened his mouth to say something — protest, no doubt — but the look on Snape's face, blacker than usual even for him, shut him up.

Snape looked at Harry and Ron. Hermione waited— everyone waited, surely — for him to take further points from Gryffindor —

And Snape at last said, "The rest of you go back to your desks."

Both boys blinking, startled at this lack of venom, they hesitated only a moment before picking themselves up — Draco too — and headed back to their positions, Harry extending the notebook to Hermione —

"Mr. Potter. Miss Granger. I will take that, please."

Hermione felt, rather than saw, all the color go out of the world. "No!"

Snape did not change expression. "I will be locking it in my desk and you may have it back after class — no, at the end of the day, Miss Granger. You and I will have words."

Harry had made no move to give the notebook — still open — to him. He looked at Hermione.

She saw what was in his face: *Say the word, and I'll swallow it before I let the slimy git get his hands on it.*

And then there would be another thousand points taken from Gryffindor, and a month-long detention, and it would all fall on Harry.

And Snape would still want to speak to her.

Despite the fact that she could feel she was starting to cry, she managed, squeakily, to say, "Sokay... give it to h-him..." She turned away and could only hear the sounds of the two sets of footsteps as the notebook was surrendered, and the sliding of a desk drawer and a *click*.

There were no more giggles, not even from the Slytherins. She collapsed into her chair, aware that she still had a blue mess that she had to clean up before she could get out of here.

If she could have apparated into a wall she would have.



He anticipated she would be about fifteen minutes late, working up her courage, but not so terrified that the prospect of him *keeping* the notebook would be more attractive.

Right on cue, the timid knock sounded on the door.

"Come in."

He didn't look at her. He made a point of continuing what he was doing, grading the stack of tests, until she had crossed the room – which she did like she was going to her own execution – and stood in front of the desk.

At last he looked up. Red puffy eyes and face, in fact the tears were already starting *again*.

Why, why did he have to have principles about those fucking *memory charms*?

"I told you I did not want to have any words on this subject with you, ever, did I not?"

She nodded, her eyes developing that squint that said she was about to cry harder.

He set down his quill and unlocked the desk. Pulling out the notebook, he handed it to her.

She held it like it carried plague. "Can I – can I go now, Professor?" she almost whimpered.

"No. I want you to understand something." He leaned back in his chair. "Do you understand the difference between a fantasy and a wish, Miss Granger?"

She blinked.

"I know that you *know* the difference. Everyone *knows* the difference; they do not always understand how to distinguish the two. Fortunately, I do. A fantasy is not a wish. It is a story one tells oneself for entertainment. It is self-contained. It serves its purpose by being a story. It is not a wish. It is not a desire to see something become reality."

She stared. Fortunately she'd stopped crying, so he imagined something of what he was saying was getting through to her.

"I think no worse of anyone for having fantasies, Miss Granger. And I do know the difference."

He wanted to add *Just don't write them in Potions Class*, but that would have defused the situation, and he couldn't *let* it be defused. She was, what, fifteen? sixteen? and she was still going to have to see him every day for the next few years; he couldn't let her carry this one like a festering sore.

"Did – did you..."

What was she going to ask him? Did he hate her when he realized *he* was the subject? Feel nothing of the adrenaline of the situation two nights ago? Good god, how could he possibly answer *those*?

"...read it?"

Oh. Well. Not that he hadn't been curious, but...

"Miss Granger. Understand several things. First, I am

not trying to embarrass you, I am trying to embarrass you as little as possible here. No, I did not read it. I saw the page Mr. Malfoy was reading when Mr. Potter passed the book to me, and that was all."

The breath she'd been holding in came out of her in a sob, and he saw her hands clench a little tighter on the notebook.

"Secondly, and this will hurt, but it is necessary: from the little I did hear and see, I am not such a masochist that I *wanted* to read anything so dreadfully bad. Good *god*, girl, *what* in heaven's name were you using as a reference for romantic fiction? That... was utterly appalling."

"Oh..." It was a very small noise.

"I have never heard such *drivel*. Is someone paying you by the adverb, or what?"

"I —" God, he hoped she wasn't going to start blubbering again. But better to be cruel now and let her try to improve herself, or give up the whole thing entirely. "It was — the first time I'd ever tried... to write —"

"And all you've ever read on the subject are those door-holding wedges of paper, I will not call them novels, that feature some top-heavy wench in a negligee and a long-haired and long-thewed pirate pawing her on the cover, yes?"

She looked like she didn't know whether to laugh or cry. Well, that was better than earlier.

"I thought so. I am giving you an assignment. This is neither detention nor homework, but it is a command from your professor nevertheless. You are not to come NEAR any attempt at writing either romantic or adventurous fiction until you have read something of merit in the genres. Take this down. Yes, use that note-

book to write; at least SOMETHING decent will be written within its pages. Get *LADY CHATTERLEY'S LOVER* by D.H. Lawrence, *ULYSSES* by James Joyce, and pay particular attention to the last chapter in that one, and as far as adventure goes, start with *THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO* by Alexandre Dumas."

She was scribbling. "I — oh, yes, I, I will, Professor Snape, I — *thank* you..."

"Don't thank me just yet, girl, *ULYSSES* is eight hundred pages of stream-of-consciousness. Not everyone thinks that one's a privilege to read."

"Are — are these in the library, Professor?"

He snorted. "Of course not. The beauty of my plan is, it will take you all the longer to get them in your hands, and thereby the greater the chance that piece of... all right, that first attempt of yours will die, as it should, untouched."

She looked up at him, biting her lips.

Oh, god. He knew that look. He'd fallen too far on the *nice* side.

Was she going to try to kiss his cheek?

Deliberately he twisted his features. "And Miss Granger, do try to come up with some more cleverly disguised names for your roman a clef characters. You are *extremely* lucky that Mr. Malfoy didn't read further down the page than he did."

He sneered openly at her. "Stavros Sableheart *indeed*."

That did it.

She squeaked, and fled, just the same way she'd done two days ago.



He couldn't sleep.

It kept surfacing like a needle on the skin of a waterglass; every time he tried to bat it away, telling himself *Forget it and go to sleep, the day's been long enough*, there it was.

At last he rose, lit a candle, and took a piece of parchment to the desk in his quarters.

Taking up a quill, Snape stared at the blank parchment for a minute before beginning to write:

He recalled his surprise when the headmaster had spoken her name.

"Sarah Findley.

There. That was how you disguised a name, for god's sake.

Yes, she will be taking over your old position, now that you have vacated it for the Defense Against The Dark Arts post. You remember her, don't you? She's one of our former students — frightfully clever girl! Well, not exactly a girl anymore: still quite young, of course, but quite capable to take over as Professor of Potions. She should arrive tomorrow, just before the first term begins."

Oh, yes, he remembered her. He was not likely to forget the day he'd learned that she had a school-

girl crush on him, and the drama with which it had been unveiled. Poor Sarah. He hoped he had handled it well — it had appeared that he had, as she had seemed neither more nor less intimidated by him, for the remainder of her years at school, than any of his other students had.

That had been, what — five, seven years ago?

Too much past perfect tense here.

And here she was, unpacking her trunks in her new quarters.

He knocked on the open door, not wanting to startle her.

"Miss — Professor Findley?"

She turned.

No, she was not prettier than he'd imagined. She'd been pretty even then. But now she was both pretty and older.

Matured. Interesting. Very, very pretty indeed.

Especially when she smiled, as she was doing right now. At him.

"Professor Ballard! Oh, how good to see you!"

He forced his smile to stay natural. Very few people ever said it was good to see him.

"Dorian, please. I insist. You are faculty now."

Her smile did not diminish. "Then you must call me Sarah, Professor — I mean, Dorian. I was so pleased to hear you were still here. And teaching a very prestigious position indeed."

"No less prestige than being named faculty at your age, Sarah."

"Well, I have been devoted to my studies."

"That is very like I remember you. I was just going for tea in the staff room, would you care to join me?"

No, she'd surely say, I've had tea already.

No, I wouldn't possibly want to take tea with you, you sinister lech. No, my boyfriend is taking me for tea in a few minutes and he's much better looking than you.

"Why, yes, I'd like that very much. We can

catch up on things. Have you been soothing many other heartbroken schoolgirls recently?"

"Oh —" He felt his smile take on a frozen sort of quality. "So, you... remember that, do you?"

"Why, Professor, I've never forgotten it."

She was still smiling. Surely she was teasing him... ?

Snape didn't realize it was morning until sunlight fell across his desk.

Finis

Colophon

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