

The Promise of a Sunny Day

by devsgma

Hermione is out hunting down a lead on a Horcrux and runs across her old Potions master. This was written as a one shot for the SS/HG Exchange during their Summer 2007 exchange. It is canon compliant through HBP.

One

Chapter 1 of 1

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Many thanks to Beck for her excellent beta work.

The idea for the story came from the request of Dream Labyrinth Hermione hunting Horcruxes (hey, that's an alliteration!) and coming across Severus on the way, HBP compliant and a happy or at least a hopeful ending.

An innocent clod of dirt was kicked in frustration. Honestly, what had she expected? That Ron and Harry would blithely send her out to find a *real* Horcrux without their *manly* assistance?

"Those bloody twits. I don't know why I even bother to listen..."

Hermione's words trailed off when she saw a cottage through a small space between two trees. The size suggested it had been fairly grand once, but as she edged closer she saw neglect had rendered it little more than a hovel. The roof obviously needed patching, and several windows in the second floor were broken. The chimney looked as though it would fall over at the mere suggestion a bird might land on its precarious edge. The door hung from what appeared to be leather hinges which had seen much better days. All in all, not a welcoming abode, which should have sent Hermione moving in the other direction.

Curiosity, however, had always been one of Hermione's weaknesses. She preferred to call it the desire to learn all she could and considered it a strength. Whichever it was, it led her to move forward and try to open the door. When the hinges disintegrated with the vibration of her footfalls on the porch and the door threatened to fall before she ever reached it, she scampered back until it quit quivering.

"Well, bugger," she muttered, looking at the board that had broken in her hurry to get off of the porch. If the porch and the door were in that sad a shape, the interior floor probably wasn't much better and the ceiling would probably fall down around her head.

Walking around the building, Hermione tried to peer inside one of the windows. Removing the dirt on the outside didn't help. There was apparently enough on the interior of the window to plant a good crop of potatoes, and she huffed in frustration before seriously considering breaking one of the panes.

"It's not like it would hurt anything. Obviously, no one lives here," Hermione reasoned aloud as she searched for and found a good sized rock to hurl from a safe distance. As she was about to let go of her missile, a voice a very familiar voice stopped her.

"I wouldn't advise doing that, Miss Granger. You might disturb the troll that has taken up residence inside, and as there are no lavatories available to hide in, you may want to let it sleep."

Whirling around with the rock still in her hand, Hermione's mouth dropped open while questions tumbled through her mind. Part of her was quite relieved to see he didn't have a drawn wand trained on her, preparing to do whatever it was that Death Eaters supposedly did to Mudbloods, but then she'd never put much credence in the rumors he was working for Voldemort.

"Professor Snape? What are you I mean... Is there really a troll inside?" she finally asked while dropping the rock to the ground.

Snape tilted his head while sending her a scowl and crossing his arms.

"I wouldn't have found it necessary to speak unless there was, now would I? Why aren't you in school, Miss Granger? The fall term has already started. Seventh Year the most important isn't a time to be skipping classes to lark about."

Hermione opened her mouth and then closed it quickly. According to rumors, he was actively working for Voldemort, and the last thing Harry needed was for his plans to be disclosed. Believe them or not, she couldn't take the chance.

"Since you're no longer a professor there - what difference does it make to you?" she asked with an impertinent hand on her hip.

The scowl deepened, the arms uncrossed before Snape turned his back on her and started to walk away.

"Quite. I don't know why I bother. Wake the troll if you wish; just don't scream too loudly when it decides to dismember the one who disturbed its slumber."

Glancing back at the cottage for a moment, Hermione trotted after him.

"Professor, wait. Please," she said to the back that was rapidly moving away from her. "Did you did you really kill him?"

Her question froze him in his tracks, and the back stiffened. Without turning around, Snape tossed her a question of his own, his voice as stiff and cold as his posture.

"I'm sure Mister Potter gave full disclosure on the circumstances surrounding the death of the Headmaster. Are you seriously questioning the integrity of the boy who lived?"

"I'm... I don't know," Hermione said quietly. "I only know sometimes things aren't what they appear, and while I've never known Harry to lie about something that important, I find it hard to believe you did."

Snape turned and considered the young witch standing a short distance away from him. She was so young, so naïve, it almost hurt to look at her. Taking a deep breath, he wondered briefly if he would regret this later.

"Believe *this*, Miss Granger. No hand other than my own slew Dumbledore. My reasons, if you were ready to ask about those as well, are my own and will remain so."

"Oh," was the soft reply he received. "Will you... Do you have a place to go?"

An arched brow met her questioning glance, and he snorted lightly.

"If I did, would you expect me to bandy the location around or keep it to myself?" he asked in a sarcastic tone.

Hermione frowned before placing both hands on her hips.

"I didn't ask for the bloody location, now did I? All I wanted to know was if you had a safe place to go!" she sputtered indignantly.

Surprise flickered over his face for a moment before he nodded.

"Yes, I do, Miss Granger, and I should probably thank you for asking."

"Well, don't let me keep you from getting there," Hermione huffed as she went to walk past him. A black-clad arm reached out to grab hers as she went past.

"You should be more careful when you're out in the woods. Trolls and dark creatures abound, even in the daylight. The way you were crashing through the underbrush, it's a wonder you didn't end up being a meal for one of them already," Snape advised in a tone that reminded Hermione of one of the times in his classroom when he'd forgotten to be sarcastic. He'd been trying to impart the importance of how necessary it was to properly prepare an ingredient for a dangerously volatile potion. When she'd mentioned it to Ron and Harry, they'd laughed it off as concern for his tenure if students got hurt while making the potion. Then, as now, she didn't agree.

"I'll try to be more careful," she told him as the hand let go of her arm.

"Do that, Miss Granger, and you may yet live to brew a decent potion on your own," Snape advised with a tilt of his head and a raised brow. The important thing was to get her on her way and out of his immediate area. His words had the desired effect as he watched the blood flush her cheeks before she stomped off into the distance. He followed her for a short time, making sure she wasn't aware of him, until she was safely out of the woods.

Retracing his path, Severus ended the illusion spell he'd placed on the front of the cottage and walked through the door-less entryway.

"We need to leave. Gather what food you can and place it in your cloak," he advised the other occupant of the cottage.

"Who was it? Do they know we're here?" was the panicked response he received from Draco.

"It was one of your former classmates, and as far as they know, a troll lives here, so I sincerely doubt they'll be returning," Snape remarked dryly as he moved to gather what few articles of clothing had been tossed around the surprisingly livable room. He would be sorry to leave in a way. The few repairs they'd managed to make had made it the most comfortable they'd had for several months but if one person had stumbled upon the cottage more were sure to follow.

A short time later, he and Draco began the trek to find a new place to hide. If Snape's eyes strayed to the area he'd last seen her, he couldn't be faulted for that, could he? After all, she might be foolish enough to bring someone to help deal with the troll.

Throughout the long months ahead, Snape would tell himself the care he'd taken to ensure her welfare was to prevent an investigation into the immediate area until he was ready to move on, but he knew there was more to it. He wasn't ready to acknowledge that the concern for his well-being had touched a part of his heart he'd long considered frozen and dead. It would serve no purpose in the days, months and possibly years to come in the battle between *good* and *evil* already on all their doorsteps. No, it would be a distraction. One he could ill afford to pay attention to.

A glimpse of her now and again was enough. Enough to know she was still alive, in one piece and growing into the full promise of her adulthood. It would prompt the memory to be taken out and looked at when he wasn't either running for his life or taking the life that belonged to someone else. The frozen part of his heart would start to thaw before it was sent ruthlessly back into the cold to await the next summons. He didn't notice it took a shorter amount of time for the softening to begin, while the amount spent on the memory lengthened.

Dreams, frequently interrupted by nocturnal wanderings of a creature Draco would hear in the distance, were dismissed as foolish or indigestion brought about by the poor

quality of the food he was forced to eat. Snape was too cynical, too versed in the ways of his world to believe for an instant there would ever come a time when he would be able to talk to her, as a man would talk to a woman he might care for, in the full light of day.

Hermione had become a beacon one he couldn't bear to acknowledge outside its existence in the dreams. It would give him hope when there was none to be had hope that there was a future waiting where he could step out of the darkness others had buried him in. His cynicism didn't stop the dreams nor the renewed sense of purpose when he should have given up in despair. After one such occurrence, he finally admitted to himself, he wouldn't *couldn't* give up if there was a small chance in Hades that sunny day he dreamed of might somehow become a reality.

AN: I had planned on continuing this, but after book seven, I found I didn't have the heart. In my mind, he will remain as I left him here. Alive and regaining hope.