

Way Past Midnight

by chivalric

A long night, a tired professor, a desperate thief – when coming home from an Order meeting, Snape has to face the consequences after dismissing a young Muggle as harmless.

One-shot Story

Chapter 1 of 1

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Warning This is an older story, written last year. The Point of View is wobbly every now and then, but as dumping the fic would have been the only other choice, I decided to post it nevertheless.

I

It was way past midnight when he finally got home. He had been in London, attending an Order meeting. The evening had been quite dull, a nice change compared to the usual catastrophes they had to take care of. They had talked, and Potter had even been able to listen for a little while before getting upset.

But on the way back home, things had become, well, let's call it unfriendly.

Snape sighed. He really should stop referring to Hogwarts as 'home'.

He kicked off his boots and lit a few candles. The room was still warm; he welcomed it, as there was a chill in his bones he wasn't used to. Maybe that stupid boy had caused it. Actually, not really a boy, but a young man. A very stupid young man.

Snape shook his head. Not worth thinking about it. He slipped out of his travelling cloak and dropped it on the floor, being too tired to hang it up. *Should go to my office, he mused, and get some work done*, but discarded that thought immediately. Even a Headmaster was allowed to have a break from his duties every now and then. The summer break was not yet over; tomorrow, tomorrow he would be up early enough to attend to his tasks.

A book on his work table caught his eye; he couldn't remember it being there earlier. *The Divine Comedy*? No, surely not one of his...

Being a bit unstable on his feet, he carefully stepped over his cloak towards the huge bookshelf that claimed one wall of his living room. There were several phials and bottles stored beside the books. "A Healing Potion, now where did I put that one?" he murmured, tracing the lines with his finger. Ah, there it was. About time. Stupid Muggle.

He uncorked the bottle and drained the contents, expecting the pain in his side to cease. Unfortunately, this didn't happen.

Hmmm. Now that might become a problem. If only Poppy were available. But she wasn't. She had offered to come in early, before the first students arrived, but he had told her to go to her niece's wedding instead. It was rare that the school was all his; he enjoyed every such occasion. Still, the timing was lousy, really, when the one time he needed her was the one time she wasn't even near the school.

Fine. He would sort it out himself, then.

With a frown he unbuttoned his shirt. "Hand me your money," the scrawny figure had screamed. Snape had been quite amused that a mere boy was trying to rob him. "And your cloak. What's that thing in your hand, that stick, give it to me, come on, hurry, hurry, you stupid idiot!" The young man had reached for Snape's wand, which was always a bad move. You didn't touch the wand of a wizard. But the boy had been a Muggle, and therefore, Snape had been careless. After all, what harm could someone do without magic?

The pain was quite substantial now. Snape still wondered what had happened. He would probably never find out, given the fact that he barely made contact with the Muggle world. And at the moment, he didn't care, either. He just wanted to heal himself and then go to bed. It had been a long day. Rummaging through his potions, he looked for something stronger than the one he had tried first.

A small noise distracted him. He raised his head and turned towards the front door. It was still as closed as he had left it.

Ah, he thought and turned towards the only other door in his private quarters, the one to his bedroom. Yes, there she was. "I can't remember allowing you to wear my shirts," he grumbled, silently adoring the sight. She was naked save for said shirt, which was black, obviously, and clinging to her appealing body in a very interesting way.

She gave him a malicious look. Apparently, she hadn't been asleep. "You said I should wear something in bed." She grinned. "You said you didn't want me to sleep naked."

"I said that if you insist on sleeping naked, I won't be able to sleep at all. Assuming you might take the hint and put some pyjamas on." He took a closer look and thought it over. Then he added, "But maybe wearing my shirt does the trick. It covers at least some parts of you. Maybe I will allow you to sleep in my bed dressed like this."

She laughed, and he couldn't help but smile at her. She rarely could be persuaded to visit him at school, and he treasured the occasions when she did, although she usually sneaked in behind his back.

He saw her frowning then. She had seen that his shirt was unbuttoned, but couldn't yet see the reason for it. Usually she did the undressing for both of them. "Something wrong?" she asked, coming closer. The light of the candles caressed her long, slender legs.

He undid the last button and shrugged off his shirt. Gasping, she took two long steps and pushed him down onto the bench in front of the long table he brewed potions on or had dinner with her at. Actually, she didn't really need to push him down his knees felt a bit wobbly, and he was grateful that he could finally give them a rest.

"You're bleeding," she exclaimed, stunned. She was used to him coming home tired, angry, dirty, or simply wanting nothing more than to make love to her, but not bleeding. He was a careful man and his disguise perfect. Although the war was over and with Dumbledore being dead for over two years, his fellow Death Eaters had never suspected the truth yet, that he was still spying on them, and everyone in the Order knew that he was loyal to their cause.

She knelt down in front of him. It allowed him to take a good look at her breasts, not really covered by his too wide shirt. But then she touched him, and he hissed, as it hurt. Her fingers, warm and strong, examined his side. Blood on her fingers; not good.

"You *are* wounded!" she said accusingly, as if he had denied the fact. She looked up at him. His face seemed to be paler than usual.

"You are stating the obvious," he snapped. He didn't really feel that well. Certainly not well enough to argue. "Could you go and get me a stronger Healing Potion than that one? Please," he added, gesturing at the table.

Following his movement, she picked up the small bottle in order to read the label. "But this should have done the trick," she objected, quite confused. She was worried, and he smirked. He liked it when she worried about him.

Then she took a second look and examined his side even closer. She even snatched up her wand from the table. *Lumos*," she muttered, overtly curious now. A good riddle, and she was lost, but she couldn't resist a riddle.

"Will you tell me what happened or do I have to start slapping you?" Looking up at him, she saw him smirking at her. He clearly thought of the benefit a good slapping would give him, but she didn't play along.

"You aren't worried, are you?" he mocked. He expected a growl, but she just frowned.

"This is serious, Severus. You should go and see Madame Pomfrey." But then, a thought hit her. "Oh!"

"Oh" indeed, Hermione. You paid me a visit only because no one else is here." When her hair was loose, he found it hard to resist burying his hands in it. Unfortunately, he needed his hands to keep himself sitting upright on the bench. Then he told her about the boy. "Stupid, he was," he complained. "Went after my wand. So I just pushed him out of the way. Didn't want to stun him; he was only a Muggle."

"Was there a noise after you pushed him?" Her voice was somewhat quiet, and she had gone pale.

"Now that you mention it yes, there was," he replied. "A sort of bang; I remember wondering what it might have been but Disapparated out of the situation instead before he did something really stupid."

"You got shot!"

"I beg your pardon?" The words didn't mean anything to him. But he could see that she was truly worried now. That worried him, slightly.

She got up and paced the room. Her bare feet didn't make a sound on the stones. Her feet were always cold and she insisted on heating them up by using his body as a suitable warming device. He never complained, loving her being so close far much more.

She faced him now. "Shot with a gun. There is a bullet in your side, which is the reason that a Healing Potion won't work. It has to get out first. Madame Pomfrey could do it, but I... I don't know how to handle that!"

"Shot as in...?" he asked, clueless. She stared in disbelief.

"Gun as in...?" he went on.

She only shook her head.

"Bullet being...?" he insisted, and she gave in, throwing her arms up in frustration. *Good idea to leave that shirt lying around*, he thought, as the movement revealed her lovely thighs.

"Shot" as in wounded," she snarled, angry at him that he had been stupid enough to underestimate a Muggle thief. "Gun" as in weapon, 'weapon' as in nasty thing that can

kill you. 'Bullet' being a small metal ball, now buried between your ribs, causing you pain, meaning that you were stupid enough not to pay any attention when I told you of the dangers of the Muggle world. Muggles can kill a Wizard, you know, if the Wizard is stupid enough to underestimate the Muggle!" She scowled at him. She was beautiful when she was angry.

Turning towards the door, she clearly intended to leave. "Where do you think you're going, dressed like that?" he called after her, but she didn't even slow her step.

"To get some advice," she answered, already storming off.

Hmmm, maybe I should go after her. Although the school was currently uninhabited, Snape didn't like the thought of Hermione running around alone, practically nude, except for his shirt. That would never do. He tried to stand up, but found that that was out of question. *Bullet*, he mused. *Gun. Damn boy. Good that I hexed him before getting away. He won't hold a gun for a while as a frog, that's certain.*

II

Hogwarts' corridors were quiet and dark. Not even a ghost was up and about, having no students to bother. Pity though; they missed quite a sight. A young woman was dashing upstairs and towards the Headmaster's office. Her hair was hanging loose, getting in her eyes, floating down her back. Curly, brown hair. Her naked feet made a soft sound patting around corners and jumping across secret traps. Her legs were long and very nicely shaped. She wore nothing but a long, black shirt that covered her just well enough, but certainly wasn't what the average witch would wear at this time of night. An observer (if there had been one still awake and able to watch) might have wondered why she wasn't wearing a nightgown or at least a blanket round her shoulders; why she didn't even have a wand with her. An observer might have pondered about the frown on her face, but there was no one there to see her.

Panting the password, she slid past the big statue that guarded the entrance to the Headmaster's office. Severus had preferred to keep quarters in the dungeons. Her presence woke some candles, but everything remained silent. The flickering light revealed several sleeping figures, snoring peacefully in their frames.

There it was, the frame she was looking for. A smallish painting in a golden frame. A figure sat dozing in a huge armchair, and a small table beside it was covered with books and parchments; Albus Dumbledore. Relieved that she was here and not somewhere else, she banged her hands left and right beside the frame, effectually waking up its owner.

"What...?" a sleepy voice muffled. Dumbledore blinked his eyes like a sleepy owl woken up too early. Searching for his spectacles, he found them right on his nose, then gave the figure in front of his frame a confused look. Stifling a yawn, he then got up and stepped close to the surface of the painting. He smiled a mild, amused smile. "Why, Miss Granger, I am truly surprised to see you here, now, as it seems to be quite late," he said. Raising an eyebrow, he continued, "May I point out that your clothing appears to be slightly inappropriate for addressing a former Headmaster?" He couldn't help but to observe the fact that the shirt she wore revealed more than it hid. "Do not misunderstand me, Miss Granger, I am delighted to see you. But what gives me the honour of your visit at this untimely hour?"

"Sorry, Professor," she said, but didn't waste time and merely ripped his frame off the wall, taking him with her.

She talked whilst she walked. "I need your help, Professor! I can't handle this on my own, and I fear that... Well, we are going to the dungeons."

"What is so important in the dungeons that it can't wait until morning?" Dumbledore was hardly ever surprised, but this here was strange enough to raise his curiosity. Life as a picture was quite boring, sometimes. Then he observed something else. *Ah*, he thought, *the shirt. I believe I know that shirt. Fascinating. Could it be...? If I'm correct I suppose it's better that I am dead already. I hazard a guess he would slaughter anyone who gets near her.* "I truly like your shirt, Miss Granger. Can I assume that it doesn't belong to you?" He would like to get confirmation on his guess, given the temper of the possible shirt's owner in question.

Too late. She already kicked a door open and placed Dumbledore's picture on the long table with a hard thump. Several of his books skidded to the picture's floor. She was out of breath, and tried to get some air in her lungs. Dumbledore was close enough to her to see her hands trembling. Frowning, he considered this as a sign of her being not just worried, but truly scared.

"Albus."

Dumbledore, picking up his books, turned to the speaker. His face lit up at the sight of the man sitting on the bench beside him. "Severus! My dear boy! Delighted to see you!" Albus beamed. So the shirt Miss Granger was wearing indeed belonged to the Potions master. He didn't bother to cover the wide smile on his face.

Snape simply scowled at him.

"Good evening," his former employee, former spy, still friend said warily. There was a growl in his voice, but Hermione intervened.

"Have a look at him, Professor Dumbledore," she interrupted. "And then tell me what to do. Madame Pomfrey isn't available and I really don't want to risk transferring him to St. Mungo's. I don't know how serious this is. I really would appreciate your help."

Dumbledore readjusted his glasses and took a look at Severus. His eyebrows rose when he saw that his successor was wounded. "Looks nasty, my dear boy. What happened, and why don't you heal it with one of your marvellous potions?"

A frustrated snort from the girl. "You're both hopeless! Goodness, Professor Dumbledore, how were you able to rule the school and the Ministry and the entire Wizarding community whilst having gaps in your knowledge the size of a dragon!" She was outraged and glared, fuming, from one man to the other. "That's a shot wound there, and I need to get the bullet out. Any idea how to do that? Yes? I'm listening!"

"Goodness, Severus, how did you manage to infect Miss Granger with your nasty manners?" Albus asked good naturedly.

"Just answer her, Albus," the Potion master replied dryly. "She won't take you back before you have provided her with an answer, believe me."

"Huh!" Dumbledore replied. "I always thought you were the more rational type, Miss Granger. I did not know you could be so... demanding." Twinkling his eyes, he regarded her over his half-moon glasses. "We all get what we earn, isn't that so, Severus." The situation was certainly highly amusing.

Snape tried to come up with a snappy reply, but his love was faster.

"How about some helpful advice!" Hermione said, losing her patience.

"Yes, yes, dear child. It seems obvious to me that without that bullet out of the wound a Healing Potion won't work," Dumbledore offered.

"Thanks," she snapped. "I figured that out myself."

"Well, a simple *Accio bullet* should do the trick then."

Snape didn't participate in the conversation. For once, he was quite content to sit and listen.

"Brilliant idea. Why didn't I think of that myself?"

"Your sarcasm seems to be infectious, too, dear Severus," Dumbledore complained. "And I can't see the problem here, Miss Granger."

"And who can guarantee that the bullet will come out the same way it got in?" she inquired icily. "You might be dead, Professor, but you should remember that I am not a

simpleton. I thought of the Accio charm. But I can't Accio the bullet and risk it creating a second wound! Plus, how do I know how fast it'll come out, or if it'll injure me as well in the process? Any answers available, *Professor?*"

She reminded him of Severus in one of his nastier moods. *She must be very fond of him, getting so upset*, Dumbledore figured, and the thought warned him for some peculiar reason.

But her outburst had silenced him nevertheless, as he simply hadn't considered the problems she had pointed out. *Being a picture might interfere with the mind*, Dumbledore secretly feared. She was right, of course. He looked at Severus again. The Potions master had always been pale, but now his skin was a pallid grey. It seemed as if that wound might be more serious than it had appeared at first sight. Time for some improvisation. But then, there was something he needed to know first. Addressing Severus, he asked, "How did you manage that?" with a quite curious subnote.

"A Muggle shot me, apparently," Snape murmured.

Dumbledore laughed, an amused chuckle in the dim room. "No, dear boy, I understood about that much. I wanted to know how you managed to manoeuvre Miss Granger into your arms! I would have thought that after Lily..."

Snape growled, low and angry. He wasn't in the mood for an inquisition, not when he was the person of interest. "None of your business, old man," he whispered. He didn't want Hermione, who was busy looking up some healing charms, to hear him arguing about her. He was hers entirely; no need for her to hear that confessed aloud. She was too sure of him anyway.

A knowing grin curved Dumbledore's lips. So Severus was made of flesh and blood after all.

Blood. *Ah, yes.* "How about using a magnet, Miss Granger," Dumbledore called, with her being somewhere behind him.

Good idea, obviously. She came round and faced him. Nodded slowly. "Might be worth a try," she agreed. A few books were stuck under her arms, tugging up the shirt. Dumbledore slightly shook his head. He would need to have a word with Severus when this was over and done with. What if someone had seen her like that? There would be endless gossip, and he knew that his friend was utterly allergic to gossip. Peeves, if Peeves had seen her running along through the corridors half naked, he would have made up one of his little limericks in absolutely no time, and the whole school would have sung it with the beginning of the term. Impossible situation, as it was obvious to Dumbledore that Severus and Hermione needed to keep their relationship under wraps.

"Take your eyes off her, Albus," Snape snarled.

Raising a questioning eyebrow, Dumbledore mildly said, "You know there is no need for jealousy, Severus."

"Just. Don't. Look!" Angry. Protective. Actually, hearing Severus Snape getting upset so distinctly soothed the former Headmaster's heart immensely. He had feared that his friend would stay solitary. Obviously, he had been wrong.

There was hammering in the background. Swearing. Something smashing to the floor, much more swearing, and then, after a while, a triumphant cry. Albus looked at Severus again. His voice was careful and quiet. "She has changed a bit since I died," he stated. There was a question in his voice.

Severus couldn't help a small smile. She had indeed. And so he nodded quietly.

"Self-confidence was never her problem, but she doesn't seem to be so shy anymore. At least not around you. Right?"

"Entirely."

"Whose idea was this? Yours or hers?" Dumbledore would have sworn it had been hers, but wanted to keep the Potions master talking. Talking would keep Severus distracted from the somewhat unpleasant situation; plus, he would be able to quench his own curiosity.

"Being both teacher and Headmaster, I would never be so stupid as to get intimate with one of my students!"

"Ah, her idea then, and after she'd left school," Dumbledore deduced, chuckling into his long white beard. "I thought as much; she always struck me as someone who gets what she wants. Good for you, I would say."

"Listen, old man...!"

"Shush!" Hermione's voice came, demanding. Turning away from the worktable, she glared at them. Her stare was every bit as terrifying as the Potions master's glare during classes.

"How do you actually manage to be with her?" Dumbledore whispered. "She'd scare the life out of me, if I were still alive, that is!"

"Just don't deny her chocolate whenever she demands it and don't address her before she's read the newspaper," Snape whispered back.

"Will you two stop talking about me!"

Two big smiles answered her.

"Stop talking about me or I'll let *you* go on with the work!"

Yes, that threat worked fine. Blissful silence filled the dungeon. Hermione picked up the device she had been tinkering with in the last few minutes, totally unaware that Severus's shirt only covered half her legs. It was of no importance right now. Severus was, and him alone. Under other circumstances she would have rather died than reveal herself in such a way, but the circumstances asked for quick actions and fast decisions, not proper clothing.

She knelt down next to Severus, who was leaning against the wall now for support. In her left hand she held some sort of a bowl, made out of a strong magnet. In her right was her wand. Hovering the bowl an inch above Severus's skin, she waggled her wand, muttered 'Accio bullet' and cheered when it came out exactly as she had directed it with the magnet, only to be caught neatly in the middle of the bowl. Fantastic. It had worked as planned. Riddle unriddled. Problem solved.

"Ouch!" said Severus Snape, passed out and slumped gracefully from the bench to the floor. Only a moment later, a Healing Spell sealed the wound efficiently.

"Damn," muttered Hermione. "Do you have any idea what it means to hover-charm someone taller and heavier than yourself in a bed too small, through a room too crammed up with things?"

"Obviously not, Miss Granger," Albus Dumbledore replied indignantly.

III

She carried his picture back not too long after she had taken Severus to bed. She had got dressed as well, now that her love was safe and sound asleep. *Pity*, Dumbledore thought. *I wouldn't have minded a longer talk with the both of them.*

She didn't hurry to take him back to his wall. When she had hung him up again, straightened the frame, and was just about to walk away, she hesitated. "Thanks,

Professor," she said quietly. Looking into his eyes, sparkling behind his spectacles, she said, "We would be grateful if you could keep that a secret. With him still spying on the Death Eaters, everyone who is close to him automatically becomes a target." She smiled a half-smile, bitter in a way, and worried.

"I figured about as much," Dumbledore said, his blue eyes regarding her closely. "This situation bothers you, Miss Granger? That it is impossible at the moment to announce your relationship with Severus?"

Her eyes became small. "That's not the point!" she hissed. "I'm a lot more worried about him than about me. I thought you would have understood that after tonight!"

Dumbledore looked at the young woman for a very long time. Finally, he said, "It seems as if Severus has finally found someone who is actually not only worth his attention, but feels similar towards him on the matter. I have waited for that for a very long time, Miss Granger. Your secret is safe for me, naturally. But..."

"What?" Hermione asked anxiously.

"Don't hurt him, Miss Granger," Dumbledore continued. "You could crush him without effort, just with a word, just with a gesture. I hope you are aware of that."

She frowned and muttered something under her breath. He had to ask her to repeat it.

"Is that advice from your lips, Professor?" There was acid in her words.

He looked at her, sternly and sad at the same time. "I did what I had to do at the time. That doesn't mean I am not sorry about it."

"You haven't got a clue what you have actually done to him, have you, Professor?"

"Miss Granger..."

"You left him alone, Professor," she said quietly, but her eyes were hard like stones, beautiful, amber-coloured stones. "You used him like a figure on a chess board, you accepted the fact that he might die, you didn't care a shit about his well-being, and in the end, you bribed him into killing you, to get a clean death. I call that awful, lousy, and horrible. So don't you tell me not to hurt him!"

"I am sure that Severus is perfectly aware of my feelings on this matter," Dumbledore answered, a threatening sub-note in his voice as this subject was nothing he cared to discuss with anyone.

But Hermione wasn't the girl she once had been; she had grown up to be a woman who would fight to the death for the man she loved, even if the prize was just a simple apology. She slammed her hand hard on the table next beside her. "NO ONE was left who would have believed him, even if he had had a chance to tell anyone," she said, her voice low and dangerous. "You used him all his life; you put him through hell and back; did you ever consider telling him, your friend, that you regretted some of your actions? That you were sorry? In person, face to face? Did you, Professor?"

Nothing but silence answered her.

"Ah," she said. "You haven't then. I thought so. Well, in this case, you can expect me in a couple of days, after he has fully recovered, and let me warn you, apologizing to Severus is not an easy thing to do." Leaving the room, she killed the candles with one wave of her hand and left Albus Dumbledore behind in the darkness of his frame whilst her words and her demand echoed in the former Headmaster's mind.