

# Confrontations.

*by mauvemagique*

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*Chapter 1 of 1*

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Disclaimer: Not mine.

Beta acknowledgment: My absolutely wonderful beta, Writermerrin, does all the hard work; I simply write blindly.

"What is the Mu... Mu... What is SHE doing here?" The hiss that came out of Draco Malfoy's mouth reminded Severus of Nagini. Severus felt agitated at his godson's use of the M-word. It's not like Draco did not know any better, but he simply did not care about the decency that Severus had been trying to implement in him throughout all these years.

"She comes here whenever she pleases and does whatever she pleases. I wouldn't know what specific disorder in my place of residence has caught her fancy right now, if you're asking me particularly."

"And... and... you allow this?" Draco sounded incredulous.

Severus sighed, eying the general direction of the woman voluntarily slaving away her talent in his house. "Don't think I gave up without fighting...it'd been another bloody war for me. Anyway, that she is here is saying something about how well that battle went for me. Besides, it has its perks."

"Do I even want to guess?" he asked in a bitterly poisoned tone.

"She's the one wanting to redeem herself for leaving me at the Shrieking Shack. Even after my thousandth insistence that she'd been young and hadn't known any better in the face of fighting an unequal war against an enemy of an unforeseen, tremendous strength. It was understandable if she had thought that the incident was merely a Death Eater getting what he deserved for his misdeeds. After all, I did cast the curse on Dumbledore, no matter how much they insist now it was euthanasia; she had no way of knowing that at the time."

"You told her all that!" He was surprised that not only would Severus forgive someone this easily, but also provide all the arguments on her behalf.

"All that and some more... I vividly remember telling her that she was forgiven for any of her wrongdoing to me, my person, my robe, or my stores... yet here she is."

"Yet you don't seem too unhappy about it." Draco's tone was accusatory.

"That she is an excellent debater might have somewhat contributed to my tolerance of the compromised solitude that I suffer because of her."

Severus turned his attention to the potion he was brewing. It was not unusual for Draco Malfoy to join him in his lab...just the timing was all wrong. Draco generally visited on the weekend mornings, and Hermione was always here for the afternoon. So they'd never met here before. This evening Draco came here looking already impatient for whatever reason. Severus was pretty sure his godson would tell him all about it, even if it was something silly or quite mundane about Scorpius's new misdeed or the current conditions of the family business. The fact that Draco did not seem to cool down did not escape him. *The lad needs to learn to let go of his prejudice at some point!*

Draco was still pacing. Suddenly, he stopped and said, "I need some fresh air." Then he rushed out before Severus could utter a single word.

Severus shrugged off Draco's restlessness for usual Malfoy melodrama.

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Draco changed his mind half-way up the stairs, and instead of going outside, he went to Severus' kitchen where he knew he would find the very person who had caused this restlessness in him.

He wanted to slam the door in a somewhat Snape-like manner...the way Professor Snape had once opened those classroom doors in their childhood, but instead, he slowly opened it and stood leaning on the frame with his arms crossed over in an unconscious imitation of a "Snapeism." He stood there for a while, observing every detail of the movements she was making. His eyes were hooded and expression carefully masked. Hermione sensed his scrutiny after a while and said, "Dinner will be ready in a minute, Professor Snape. I hope you like Peking duck; I'm cooking Chinese tonight..." her words got lost when she saw it was not Snape at the door.

"Hello, Mudblood," Draco drawled.

"Ferret." Her tone was equally cold.

"What exactly is it that you are doing in here?"

"I could ask the same question of you." She turned her back to him.

"This is my godfather's home. I belong here. You on the other hand... do not."

"Would you let your godfather know that dinner is ready on your way out of the kitchen?"

"I'm no one's elf, especially not a Mudblood's, and I'm not leaving until I get my answers from you."

"There had to be a legitimate question first ..."

"I have already asked you a question...WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?"

"Cooking Peking duck, obviously. Would you care to join us?"

"After everything that happened, you think I would eat something that you cooked?"

"Why not? I'm good at it. Your uncle seems to be fond of my cooking even if he'll never come out and give me a certificate for it or anything for that matter, and he eats happily when I cook. And I didn't know you were coming, so there is no poison in there for you." Hermione forced her voice to sound logical.

She cleaned up the messes she had made with cooking and set up the small dining table with wave of her hand, using some sort of nonverbal domestic spell that Draco had no way of knowing, neither did he care to know.

At this point, Severus had climbed up to the stairs to see if he was required to make funeral arrangements.*surely those two have killed each other already!*What he heard made him pause before entering the kitchen.

"So, you are putting something into his food; what is it? Potions? Muggle drugs? He seemed delusional enough to be happy about your presence."

There was a hint of hurt in her eyes. As she tried to get past him, she said, "Good bye, Malfoy."

But as she was about to pass him, Draco stretched his hand and caught her wrist, desperately saying, "Mia!"

*Mia? He calls her...Mia! What happened to "Mudblood"?*Curiosity got the better of Severus. He silently cast a spell...which he wouldn't necessarily phrase as a dark one...if he wasn't pressed hard enough...to enable him to see what was going on in his kitchen between the two of his former pupils.

Hermione whispered, "Don't call me that," but allowed herself to be pulled into his embrace.

But he didn't listen to her, for he kept on whispering into her hair, "Mia, my Mia, my sweet, darling, beautiful Mia, how I have missed you!"

Severus' eyebrows touched his hair line.*How could I've missed it? Who else knew? Lucius? Cissy? When?*

She shivered from the endearment, and he held her as if his life depended on it. "It's been so long since I have held you, yet you fit perfectly in my arms." Gone was the sneer, the insult...the man standing in the shabby kitchen of one Severus Snape looked content. He closed his eyes and inhaled the scent of her hair. Severus couldn't remember the last time when he saw Draco looking so peaceful.

"This isn't right. Let me go, Draco."

*She is right...it... all feels so wrong. They should do the sensible thing and start hexing each other*was Severus' opinion.

"No. Please, Mia."

*All those years of name-calling and all the venom-spitting down stairs... and he just begs her.*

"You are married, Draco," Hermione protested.

"Only because you rushed off to marry the Weasel. I wanted to hurl it in your face, too."

*This information is too good; maybe I should use it to get her out of my house, but then again she does an awful lot to "redeem" herself.*

They disentangled themselves, and Hermione moved away a little, asking, "Why did you marry her and not Parkinson?"

"Why on earth would I want to marry Pansy? I can't even tolerate her." Draco spoke venomously.

"Oh!" Hermione arched an eyebrow. "That's not what I remember. I seem to remember you liking her quite enough to ... Oh, how do I say that without vulgarizing my words!"

*She's a prude! Always knew she is an overeager "prudy two shoes!"*Snape smirked at his own joke.

"You never gave me a chance to explain it! Damn it, Hermione!" Draco roared in frustration.

"I remember what I saw; it's etched in my memory forever. How could you? How could you do that with her, with anybody else after what happened that day? Do you even remember?" Hermione was crying for the pent-up sorrow that been hidden for so long.

Walking towards her, Draco reached out and touched a ringlet of her hair. "I remember everything. There's not a day goes by that I don't remember, Mia. How could I not? We made love that day and promised each other to love forever and fight off everything Lucius or Narcissa Malfoy would throw on us. We hadn't thought of the threat that Ronald Weasley and Pansy Parkinson might be bringing in."

*It went that far! I always thought Weasley was her only one, not that I would keep tabs on any of those troublemakers anyway, but Draco* even more surprised Severus asked himself.

"How could you still blame Ron for your infidelity? Ron had nothing to do with it. You were the one..."

"Oh, for heaven's sake! Say the bloody word, Hermione." Draco let go of her hair and moved back a bit away from her.

"I will not. You want me to say that word for heaven's sake? What condition heaven must be in nowadays?"

*Ms. Prudy has a sense of humor.* Snape felt amused.

"Stop playing with words; I'm not Snape." There was impatience in his words.

"So I've noticed. Go ahead explain it to me," Hermione said biting, turning away from him.

"You will listen...after all these years? What good would it do? Weasley has left you, hasn't he?" Draco spat.

"It seems to be a pattern in my life," she mumbled, and Severus had a sudden urge to throttle Ron Weasley for the wrongs he had done to this witch. No wonder she had come to him to ask for forgiveness; she probably thinks if she could correct every little mistake in her life, no more injustice would be written in her fate.

"I didn't leave you! You left me. Rushed to Weasley's arms to cry over the harm *thisslimy serpent* did to you, didn't you? Did you once pause to ask yourself why he was taking you for a walk in that direction at that hour of the night? The dungeon is hardly the detour to Gryffindor tower, nor is it still the popular site to walk."

"We had wandered off track, talking."

"Right! In the dungeon! Whenever else have you done that? Why don't you see it for what it was? He wanted you, she wanted me. They got together and made plans to break us up."

"That's absurd. Ron would never do anything so low." At Draco's raised brow, she corrected herself, remembering how she had caught the second person in her life in bed with another. History surely is a pretty boring subject if it kept on repeating itself this early in one's life.

"Ron had no idea we were seeing each other. I didn't say a single word to anybody about us." She tried to maintain her point.

"Hermione, he had his eyes fixed on you almost at the same time that I had. He must have stalked you. Since we were hiding from the others to be together, we were missing from many things. You never know. Potter's best strategist and a vindictive Slytherin had planned together a revenge on their respective enemies. I was drugged with Lust Potions and Imperioed; you were lured in to see me compromised."

"How would you feel if it had been me?"

"I might have at some point cooled down to ask for an explanation and not jumped into the planner's arms to marry. And for your information, I did question Pansy under the Veritaserum I nicked from Severus' store. She sang like a canary about it all. You can look at my memory or hers, if you want."

*He did it, too? I thought it was only Granger who stole from me. He didn't have to...he could have asked for it any day.* Severus chose not think about the questions he would have asked if Draco had indeed asked for the truth potion.

"You'd joined Umbridge's brigade to spite me. You'd chosen to try to kill Dumbledore, refusing any help Professor Snape might provide to defect from Lord Voldemort's service."

"First one was to spite you. But the second one had another motive...I couldn't carry on any longer without you. All of it felt like such a burden that I wanted to end my life. I could not be famous like your friend Potter, but I wanted to go with a big bang to indicate to you...look, Hermione Granger, look at me, and know what you have made out me by ignoring me, by leaving me."

"What!"

"Yes." He shrugged. "I'm a Slytherin; we like fame."

Not minding to that, she said, "Yet you'd helped us by refusing to know me when we were caught in your house and Confunded Greyback silently when he tried to ..."

"You noticed! I couldn't do much with Aunt Bella, those Death Eaters, and my parents present."

"I always knew it was you. There wasn't any one else, in that room, who would have done it, and I knew a thing or two about Werewolves."

*She was tortured by Bella and Greyback! I've never thought about what she had endured in her expedition with Potter. She never speaks about anything that had hurt her...* realization dawned on Severus...*but that doesn't mean they don't exist; she just hides her grief well.*

"It would have never worked between us, no matter how deeply in love with one another we were. Your parents had made it clear from the start. If your father didn't kill me outright, your mother surely would have cast some dark curse to part us eventually. She's way too overprotective of you."

On the other side of the door, Severus shivered slightly as he remembered how Narcissa Malfoy made him take the Unbreakable Vow for her precious son. She had gone to the extreme of lying in the face of Lord Voldemort when she thought it would help her son.

"We could have left for the Far East or Africa, somewhere."

"You are the only child; I couldn't be the reason you parted from your parents. That would be wrong. You would have eventually hated me for that in some corner of your mind."

"You think too much. See what happens when a Gryffindor thinks? They jump to wrong conclusions. I would have protected you against anything and anyone, including my parents and even the Dark Lord, with my life. Anyway, here we are. We can start over where we left off. You've got rid of that awful Weasel, and I'm still standing on the same spot where you left me. If you want, I will even send Scorpius away with his mum when I send her the papers."

"Draco! I can't believe you even think of that!" Hermione shrieked in shock.

"Why is it so hard to believe that I want you the same way as before, if not more?"

"And what's their fault...your son and your wife?"

"I have never thought of loving her...no matter how much she might have wanted me to...I just couldn't. I gave my heart away a long time ago. I feel some affection for her...something akin to what one feels for his pet. Why? Because she is not you."

"Don't say that, please. Go home to your family, Draco. I'm no Lavender Brown...I won't be the cause of you wrecking your lives. What we had will always be the most precious to both of us, but we can't go on like nothing ever happened in our lives in between and live happily ever after. Time has changed us all; you are just acting the ostrich about it."

"It is Severus, isn't it? Is it because of him you don't love me anymore? Moved on, have you? That's why you come here and play house-elf for him? So that he might bestow a crumb of his affection on you? I've got news for you, Granger...That. Will. Never. Happen. He's in love with your best friend's mummy...dead mummy at that."

"Stop it, Draco. There is nothing between the dear ol' Professor and me. I know about his obsession with Harry's mum. No need to be a prat about it. His love for her is in some ways about the same as I feel about you."

"Yet you no longer want me. Can't you see I'm dying inside every day?"

Hermione caressed his face with both of her hands at those words, then kissed him gently on the lips. Letting go, she said, "I set you free, my first love. Go live your life from this day forward."

Severus felt uncomfortable watching them but, at the same time, could not take his eyes off of her. He didn't want them to get together for some reason*It's because Draco has a responsibility to his family, or maybe I'm jealous of their possible second chance, as I had none with my Lily.* Deep down he knew he wasn't being entirely truthful with himself.

But Draco pulled her to his chest and devoured her mouth in a searing kiss. "I could never be free of you. But haven't I always respected your choice?"

Hermione could only nod in response with her eyes drowning in tears.

Draco raised her face with his forefinger, saying, "Hey, sush... your tears always break my heart, more if I'm the cause of it." He planted a soft kiss on her forehead this time. "You know I would let everything go in a matter of seconds if you only say so. Until then, I will act as Mr. Responsibility. Meanwhile, don't go breaking my poor old uncle's heart." Smiling sadly, he Disapparated, leaving Hermione to sob alone after him.

Severus felt uneasy about the entire incident that had just taken place. He felt undecided about whether he should go in and comfort Hermione. What would he say? What would he know about mending a broken heart? He has been carrying the similarly shattered pieces in his chest for so many years. He had nothing to say to her, as the usual "it will get better with time" didn't apply here, and he didn't want to lie to her.

While he was hesitating, Hermione had calmed down. She wiped her eyes while casting a warming charm on the dish she'd made for Snape and Disapparated.

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That night Severus couldn't eat well, not because the Peking duck was ill cooked...no, it was absolutely fabulous, but he had lost his appetite witnessing what happened between Draco and Hermione. He only sat down at the dinner table to honor her efforts for him.

The next day, she didn't come. She always comes here after work. Maybe she's not feeling well. Maybe she feels "redeemed" now, or perhaps something happened at her work, he tried to tell himself.

He missed what he called her endless chattering, her not-so-quiet reading habit, how her face reacts to what she's found written in the books, how she hums when she brews potions and recites silly love poems when she cooks something fancy...just to annoy him, he used to think.

He remembered, once in the earlier days of her invasion, he had been in a bad mood for something or not, and there she was sitting cozily on his couch, reading and smiling at the written words, unaware of his inner turmoil which had been grating on his already sensitive nerves. He had decided to exact revenge on her. He said as if to himself, "I've heard many times that some people could light a room with a smile, and always thought you were one of those people, Ms. Granger..." She raised her surprised, but still smiling, face to his praise at this point, then he finished by mercilessly saying, "I was wrong. Too bad." He remembered how darkly he felt after wiping that smile from her face.

How was he any better in his treatment of ruthlessly hurting her than Draco or Mr. Weasley? But she had always come back, being the one to shoulder everyone's responsibility.

On the third day, it became clear that she was not coming, and he was missing her. Everything felt sort of empty and pointless without her there, in his house... Oh, hell, in his life. He hadn't felt this lonely for quite some time...since the day she showed up on his door, smiling, lighting up his doorstep, his house, his life.

But she obviously didn't feel in the same way about him. He remembered what she told Draco about not having any relationship with "dear ol' Professor" Snape. But then again, she hadn't done what her heart wanted for a long time; her relationship, or the lack of it, with Draco proved that.

"We will see about that," Severus stated to his empty house and left to find her.

He went to her cottage; she wasn't there. Applying a Disillusionment Charm, he went to her office, she wasn't there either. He even stopped by Draco's to make sure there had been no change made on their decision that he wasn't aware of. With an aid of a little Legilimency and a mild Obliviation...he never said he was above using them on unsuspecting godsons when they were in danger of making grave mistakes like attempting to kill a headmaster or stealing his ...life source...he found out that wasn't the case either.

Contemplating speaking to Potter about it, he returned home to find her sitting on her side of the couch, reading. He had included her in his ward long ago.

"You are back," she said.

He wanted to throttle her for his ordeal, kiss her for coming back, to petrify and pickle her for making him admit his feelings for her to himself, to chain her so she wouldn't leave him like this, and to kiss her, and kiss her...

So, he masked his emotion and said, "So are you. What happened?"

"You already know what happened." He wanted to protest, but she pointed to the kitchen door, saying, "You forgot."

Severus wanted to die from the embarrassment, and the way she was scrutinizing him... He needed something to save his face, so he said, "It only took you three days to let go of Mr. Malfoy? Getting over someone seems rather easy, wouldn't you say?"

"I let Draco go a long time ago, even though I don't know if I could ever get over him... Ever. It's hard to find someone who would love me for me, not what I've accomplished. Would you rather have me gone with Draco, or is it you still would rather have me gone, period?"

Severus walked towards her, presenting his open palms in an offer for her to grab on. Even though she looked surprised, she took his hands in hers, and he pulled her up.

When she stood before him, looking curiously at his eyes, he said her name for the first time. "Hermione, I have a confession to make. I've lied to you."

She looked panicked as if she would make a run for the door. Severus understood the grounds for her panic came from her past experiences, so he held her even more closely and said, "I've lied to you. My life is entirely too dark without your smile to light it up every day."

She closed her eyes for a moment, and then opening them, she searched his face in fear of some horrid practical joke and asked, "Truly?"

Severus smiled as he lowered his face to whisper in her ear, "Truly. Truly. Truly."