

Unrequited Love

by Pearle

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Summary: One lonely heart, longing for another. Add an opportunity not to be missed and you have a very strange brew indeed.....Rating for implied.

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~ Unrequited Love ~

"Can I ...ask you something?"

"What is it, Granger?" Severus carefully measured out a level spoonful of unicorn's tears, mindful of the rarity of the ingredient as he added it to the potion he was brewing.

Hermione waited until he'd added the tears to the bubbling cauldron before continuing. "First, try calling me Hermione." How many times had she asked him to call her by her first name?

Severus looked up. The young woman had returned to Hogwarts as the new assistant matron. Part of her duties included brewing the potions needed for the hospital wing. A task that forced him to endure her presence in his private lab for a few hours every weekend, it would seem.

"What is it, Hermione?" he asked, not bothering to hide the annoyance he was feeling.

"Never mind." She turned back to the partially chopped roots, feeling her cheeks flush slightly with embarrassment. Why had she even opened her mouth? Just because he'd been a little bit more civil over the last few weeks was no reason to think he would welcome any kind of friendly conversation.

Severus sighed. "What is it? Is something wrong? Do you want me to fetch Minerva?"

"No, it's nothing. Really. Forget I said anything."

"Very well."

They worked in silence for another half hour, Severus curious what she had wanted to ask him but too prideful to pursue it any further.

Hermione's quiet voice broke the silence. "Have you ever cared for someone but were too scared to tell them?"

"I beg your pardon?" What the devil was she talking about?

"Has there ever been someone you liked, but you were too afraid to tell them?"

Her frank stare unnerved him as much as the question. "You want to know about my 'love' life?"

"Not exactly. I have this... friend, and she's interested in this... person, who doesn't seem to know that she exists. I'm not sure how to...advise her."

Severus studied her eyes. "Your...friend?"

"Yeah. What would you do, if you were in that position?"

"How does your...friend know the object of their interest?" Was she interested in him? It wouldn't be the first time a student thought he was interesting. Usually it was a Muggle-born who viewed him as some sort of tragic figure, deciding the love of a good woman would "redeem" him. A few well-chosen barbs and they would usually end up running off in tears, realizing he was not a nice man, and definitely not someone that needed "saving." Granger. Hermione. Her presence was tolerable now that she was no longer his student, but as a lover?

"They sort of, uhm, work together. Not all the time, but sometimes, sort of." Hermione mentally berated herself. Why couldn't she leave well enough alone?

"A co-worker." She couldn't be serious. "I suppose I would try to see if the interest was mutual. Maybe over drinks. Try dropping a few subtle hints and see what happens. Though most Gryffindors are not known for their subtlety."

"Thanks a lot, enough with the house prejudices." Didn't he ever stop? She was baring her soul and he was lobbing insults. "Drinks. That's not a bad idea. Doesn't most of the staff go down to the Three Broomsticks on Friday nights? Maybe it would work."

Most of the staff? Maybe her interest wasn't in him, after all. Lupin? He was teaching Defense Against the Dark Arts again this year. Or maybe that new Muggle Studies teacher. What was his name? Henderson? Herndon? "Does this...person your friend is interested in, frequent the Three Broomsticks?"

"Sometimes."

That did it. It wasn't him. Good. He wasn't interested in her in the least. So why did he feel let down? "Where's that vaunted Gryffindor courage? It's close to seven now, why not see if this 'person' is as interested in you as you are in them?" he asked with a sneer, dropping all pretense of this imaginary "friend".

"Maybe. All right. I'll give it a shot. I thought I heard Shirley mention she would be there tonight, anyway. Thanks, Severus. I know I'm not your favorite person, but I do appreciate you listening." Impulsively she hugged him before turning back to the potions bench to clean up the remains of the ingredients she had been using.

"Shirley?" Severus stood stunned, his hands hanging limply at his side.

"Yeah, the new librarian." If she noticed his confusion, she didn't mention it.

"Didn't I hear... wasn't she seeing some bloke that worked at the Apothecary?" Shirley? Shirley! Granger liked women? Hadn't she and Weasley dated her sixth year? And what about Viktor Krum? Shirley?

"Robert? They broke up about a week ago. But she dated a woman from my exercise group before that." Hermione levered the cauldron she'd finished cleaning under the table before wiping down the potions bench.

"But you dated Weasley. And Krum," he blurted out.

Hermione shrugged. "Yeah, well, it doubles your chances of getting a date Saturday night."

Severus watched as she picked up the unused potions ingredients and headed for the storeroom. Hermione. He would have bet Galleons that she had a small crush on him. Hermione and Shirley. Hermione and Shirley and.... Why not? A plan started to form in his mind.

"Well, wish me luck. I would imagine the Friday night crowd is in full swing by now."

"Perhaps I should accompany you to the Three Broomsticks. Moral support if your attentions are not...welcomed." Severus gathered his notes, not meeting Hermione's gaze.

"You're offering me a shoulder to lean on?" Severus Snape, bastard extraordinaire, was not known for his philanthropic gestures. "And in return?" she asked with a smirk.

"You wound me to the quick, madam. Are you insinuating I have an ulterior motive?"

"You're a Slytherin, Severus, of course you have an ulterior motive." Hermione studied his profile. Why not? She'd had a bit of a crush on the man during her Hogwarts days. If things didn't work out with Shirley, perhaps she could have a bit of a tumble with Snape. Actually, Shirley was just as much into men as women, and Snape was an ex-Death Eater so he had to be used to sharing. Maybe she could interest the two of them in a few extracurricular activities, something to liven up the weekends. "Why not? The more the merrier, I always say."

"Do you now?" Maybe sharing a lab with Hermione, among other things, wouldn't be such a chore after all. "Shall we?" Severus snagged his cloak from the hook next to the door.

"By all means." Hermione stopped and turned in the doorway, her hand resting lightly on his forearm, her fingers tracing feather-soft circles over the sensitive skin at the inside of his wrist. A mischievous smile lit her face. Severus watched as her eyes darkened. "It may take a few trials before we figure out what 'combinations' work best. You know, Severus, sometimes three *isn't* a crowd."

"Indeed." As he followed Hermione out the door, he couldn't help but wonder what lay ahead. For the first time in forever, Severus Snape was looking forward to the coming school year.

---Finis---

A/N: Odd, I know. This little one-shot is the result of my sleep-deprived mind mulling over the phrases "unrequited love" and "sometimes three isn't a crowd" along with my liking for O. Henry-type endings. It really takes on a new twist when you add a Slytherin to the mix.

A grateful thank you to my beta, Nakhash, for her corrections, suggestions, and never ending supply of commas. Another set of eyes is always helpful, the mistakes, however, are still mine.

Pearle