

# Understanding Apples

*by cflower*

The sequel to *Snape's Profound Question*. How can Hermione start to understand the importance of blue apples?

## Two

*Chapter 1 of 1*

The sequel to *Snape's Profound Question*. How can Hermione start to understand the importance of blue apples?

Disclaimer: I do not own anything that J.K. Rowling has written.

I need to thank Toffeeliz for her prompt. Without her, this amusing idea would've never existed. I also want to thank everyone for their inspirational reviews. The support helped complete this chapter.

All of the ingredients and plants (magical and mundane) are canon. The information was researched on the Harry Potter Lexicon.

~oOo~

"The garden suggests there might be a place where we can meet nature halfway."

-Michael Pollan

~oOo~

Even though Hermione's legs were burning and her heart was thumping louder than was probably prudent, she continued her fast-paced walk to the front of the line. With a quick impatient turn of the head, she could see that Harry and Ron were making the petulant choice to continue their leisurely walk. With a snort of satisfaction, Hermione turned back with the memory of Neville stepping on the heel of Ron's left foot as a result of his contrary slow pace. Rolling her eyes at their perplexed expressions (because why the hell would they want to keep up with the teacher or actually be active in the learning process, or want to be closer to a man who tended to stare intensely at apples?), she determinedly made haste.

Briefly, Hermione reflected on the crisp crunch of old leaves under her impatient feet and the chilly wind that seemed to playfully try to stifle her forward progress. The leaves were painted, by nature, deep hues of red, playful shades of orange, and cheerful yellows. The occasional brown spot on a leaf was a reminder of the life that eventually ends.

Picking up her pace (this was definitely not prudent), she passed Draco Malfoy and his cronies. Although this was Advanced Potions, the class was needed by pretty much everyone who wanted a well-rounded education. As a result, pretty much everyone's parents made sure their child was enrolled... Pity.

Hermione tried to ignore the fear that sharply went through her. Even after six years of dealing with Malfoy, she still couldn't shake the anxiety of crossing paths with bullies. It was embarrassing, a weakness even, but Muggle or magical, bullies were bullies. She was all too aware from her old life how hurtful they could be. The memories, she guessed, had never left her.

Releasing a nervous breath (she had made it past Malfoy), Hermione took into account the oddity of this class-day. Professor Snape never had them collect potion ingredients before. No. It was as constant as the house-elves cooking tapioca pudding every Wednesday. It was also as constant as the fact that she ran out of socks come Friday. No. Snape did not let any of the students near unharvested potion ingredients. It was known by all the students that all the ingredients needed for each lesson were conveniently located on the student shelves. Every student was too much of a dunderhead to even breathe on the door-knob of Snape's storeroom.

But apparently, Snape had something up his long, black sleeve because today was different.

And Snape didn't do different.

~oOo~

Hermione decided that being directly behind Snape had its positives. (Okay, so technically she was three feet behind Snape. Hermione Granger was not stupid and certainly knew enough to allow Snape his personal bubble.)

Oddly enough, ever since that lunch where Snape was The Man with the Apple in his Hand, Hermione had desired to be closer to him (but not too close!). Sure, there had been other lunches where Snape had been completely fixated on his apple. Where she had seen the man... But she wanted more of something.

*Something* may be dangerous to want, but damn-it, she wanted it!

She craved personal moments. Hermione was always so focused on her academics, on exceeding expectations, on logic, and on analytical skills, that sometimes she craved pure pathos. Like a dieter wanting chocolate, she wanted to capture a purely emotional moment. A moment so multifaceted, so confusing in that human way, it could only be explained by sense.

And so as Hermione tried to keep up with her professor as he walked to the Herbology gardens, she examined the tautness of his back, the fluid motion of his legs, and the strength of his stare (she could sense it from the back of his head). She could also sense that his face was taken up by his customary scowl, as if he had much more desired things to do.

Perhaps he did.

Perhaps he *wished* he did.

"Miss Granger, must you walk so close behind me? I promise that you will not miss the stimulating learning that will be taking place in this class period."

"Pardon me... sir."

Oops. Hermione, belatedly, realized in her excitement that she was one foot too close to him. Three feet, not two feet, Hermione repeated to herself.

~oOo~

Five more steps and he would whip around to look at his... students. That was another question he thought about (almost as frequently as blue apples):

Why should students be called students if they didn't want to learn?

Or perhaps they did want to learn. Just not from him.

Time to turn around, Snape thought. He smirked inwardly at how the wind helped move his robes as he turned for a dramatic touch.

Silence swept over the students as they started to take in their surroundings.

Severus Snape had five classroom voices, and he employed one at this very moment.

In his soft, commanding voice, Snape asked, "Is any student aware enough to know where we are standing?"

It took several seconds, but finally Neville Longbottom raised a shaky hand (he had moved to the front of line as well), with a little help from a nudge by Hermione.

"Yes, Mr. Longbottom?"

In a voice that gradually got stronger with every word, Neville answered the question. "It's the Herbology garden, sir."

In his amused, yet not-so-satisfied voice Snape answered, "Why, indeed Mr. Longbottom. How astute of you. But the true question is why we should care about being in the garden, hmm?"

Now Neville would have the answer. "To collect a potion ingredient, then, sir."

Ah, the amused-satisfied voice could make an appearance now.

"One point from Gryffindor for the first vague answer, and three points to Gryffindor for the concise answer that we could never have acquired from Miss Granger."

He heard a feminine gasp and observed a red face right in front of him. Amused and satisfied, indeed.

~oOo~

In the simplest words, the Herbology garden was serene and beautiful. The gate that served as a symbol of welcome was made from magical infused iron (no rust!) and was peppered with engravings of various magical and mundane plants. Stepping through the gate, the view opened up into two main garden beds. Each huge garden bed (one for mundane, and one for magical) was divided into smaller beds for grouping plants of similar origin. Serving as a border between the mundane and magical beds, was a lively river that ran though the garden (there was an opening in the fence), and out the garden to pour into the famous Hogwarts lake. Normally, Professor Sprout would specifically harvest whichever plant was needed for the lesson in the Greenhouse. The main path, moreover, was side by side with the river and branched off to each divided bed. Hermione took this all in as she kept pace with Snape. Trying to divide her attention between Professor Snape and which plants they were passing (mandrake root, peppermint, and daisy), she thought this lesson was like solving a puzzle.

Finally, Snape stopped and whipped around for a second time to face his students. Hermione noticed with nervousness and excitement how he glanced briefly down at her before looking over to the rest of the class. Quickly, Hermione made sure to check that three feet was between them.

~oOo~

Hermione looked around the garden as she took a break from harvesting. With various amounts of energy (Neville was one of the few students who examined every plant he picked up), the students continued to harvest ginger root. Although they had learned to make Wit-Sharpener Potion in fourth year, Snape thought it was important to take time each year for review.

This wasn't puzzling, and most students feared the professor too much to stop work for a break.

What was puzzling was how the professor was nowhere to be found.

Did any of the other students notice? Or, were they just thankful?

Looking a few feet away at Harry, she thought better of getting his attention. She also didn't bother Ron, for he was too immersed in trying to stay clear of the spiders located in the soil.

A couple of minutes ago, Ron had asked her worriedly if there were a lot of spiders in gardens.

"Yes, Ron, I believe there are. Actually, look, there is one crawling up your arm. Can't you feel it?"

"What? No!" Ron said in a terrified voice.

With that admission, he proceeded to stand up from his crouch and dance around, flailing his arms, in order to get the spider off.

Coming over, Harry teased, "Ron, I knew you had arachnophobia, but I never knew you were so scared of imaginary spiders."

Looking thoroughly harassed, Ron could only glare at Hermione.

Ron was only this gullible when it came to his deep fears.

~oOo~

Moving slowly away from her harvesting spot, Hermione tried to find where Snape was. Like gears clicking into place, Hermione thought of the fruit bed. Apples were fruit! What a brilliant thought!

Making her way to the fruit garden, her jubilant feeling vanished. No tall, black-clad man was there. The professor never feared speaking to his students or being in front of people. But what about the man?

A soft expression made its way to Hermione's face as she recalled how intensely he had stared at his apples at lunch. It was a private intensity, not meant for daft students or the callous world.

Moving around the fruit bed, Hermione focused on the magic tree in the corner. The garden had trees grown to give the plants shade. In the shadow of the tree, which projected onto the fence, she saw a ripple of black fabric peak out into the sunlight. Squinting her eyes, she saw that he was staring thoughtfully not at a magic tree, as she originally thought, but at an apple tree. Hermione knew he hadn't noticed her since he was still gently caressing each apple. He touched each one like he was their father. A surge of worry coursed through her. He had left the students alone, and he hadn't noticed her yet. What was the matter with him?

It was too much for her. She wouldn't let him feel even more embarrassed. Hermione determinedly dragged her foot loudly across the path.

To her surprise, he jumped slightly in alarm before controlling himself enough to glare at her. In his most menacing voice that normally was used when he was embarrassed, Snape asked, "What in Merlin's name are you doing here?"

"Sir, I--"

"You should be harvesting. If anything, I thought you were intelligent enough to follow precious directions."

Hermione moved into the shade of the tree to get a better look at his face. It was a daring move. He was using his most volatile voice.

"I'm sorry, sir, but I happened to notice that you disappeared. I simply wondered where the Potions teacher had gone."

She felt fine about this answer. After all, it wasn't a lie.

Snape crossed his arms. "I'm right here, Miss Granger."

"With *your* apple tree for company?"

Snape changed his mind before responding. It only took a second for his manner to shift, but it did, and that was scary to Hermione. She had never truly argued with him before.

Hermione recognized his next voice. It was the one used for fabricating cunning plans. It was more calming than his menacing tone and more conversational than his soft one.

"Miss Granger, seeing as you are so bored with the assigned harvesting, I suppose I have another harvesting job for you."

"Really, sir?" Hermione said cautiously.

"Why, yes. *Isanthus brachiatus*," Snape enunciated.

Automatically, she dug through her mind for the answer to this veiled question.

"Fluxweed, sir." His nod propelled her to continue. "A member of the mint family. Perfect for Polyjuice because of its capacity to change appearance."

Speechless, Hermione glared at him. He was pointedly looking at her wild hair and dirty knees.

Crossing her arms to mimic his stance, Hermione was ready to counter.

"Moonstone, sir, is used in various potions such as the Draught of Peace. It comes in a variety of colors and--"

"Can help a person gain emotional balance. Why, that is a great idea Miss Granger, for you."

Ignoring her indignation, Snape moved in for the kill.

"*Levisticum officinale*."

Opening her mouth to answer, Hermione stopped in shock.

This hadn't happened in years, but the feeling was so personal. It felt like the floor had dropped from under her. She didn't know the answer. She had skipped that chapter in the textbook, since she had been too absorbed in thinking about Snape's apple fixation that night to continue her reading.

"Lovage, Miss Granger. A culinary and medicinal herb of the carrot family. It is best used in confusing and befuddlement draughts."

Ah, there was his amused-satisfied tone again.

The wind had picked up, and at that moment Hermione got a whiff of a delicate apple smell from the tree providing them the shade to argue in.

A calm feeling swelled up inside Hermione.

"Wormwood. Used in the Draught of Living Death. It is also the traditional symbol of... bitterness."

Looking up at the tree, Hermione gently picked an apple and severed it from its mother tree.

She walked up to Snape...

Three feet...

Two feet...

One foot...

Once she was directly in front of him, she offered him the apple. It was perfectly round with a soft inside and a crisp skin. Perfectly harmonious, unlike the earth.

For several seconds, Hermione knew she had seen the man staring at her. He wasn't sneering, or manipulating his voice, or using the wind to make himself more intimidating. He was looking at her like she offered him the world. A new, perfect world.

But then, Professor Snape was back.

"No, thank you, Miss Granger. I am not hungry. "

It was a dismissal. Time to go back to class. Dejectedly, Hermione turned around to walk back.

After a few steps though, he said her name again.

Turning her head around, she waited. His face seemed to be filled with some desire he couldn't fully hold back. He looked up at patches of blue sky not hidden by the tree, as if he was searching the color for something.

"Indeed. It is *my* apple tree."

She wouldn't ask him her next question about the sky. Not today.

With a heart filled with a little more understanding, she walked back to her assigned spot.

~oOo~