

# Straight to the Point

by *fishstickhater*

Hermione Granger is trying to live her life after the war as peacefully as she can. One day, a surprise left at her place of employ changes all of that. AU, mild language.

## In the Beginning

Chapter 1 of 3

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Hermione Granger's eyes snapped open as she fumbled for the wand under her pillow. Casting a quick *Lumos*, she just managed to stumble to the adjacent bathroom before retching into the sink. Shuddering, she brought a hand to her forehead, pushing back the curls that clung to her sweat-soaked skin. It had been that damned nightmare again, the one with all the horrid snakes, slithering around her, choking her. Taking a shaky breath, she rinsed her mouth and cupped her hands, using the cool water to soothe her feverish face and neck.

Sighing, she walked back into her smallish bedroom, rubbing her eyes and yawning. Crookshanks, lying at the end of the bed, gave her a disdainful look, clearly stating that he had had quite enough of that, thank you. Chuckling a little, she stroked his squashed head and got a reluctant purr before he closed his eyes and drifted off to dreams of fish, cream, and that delightful Mrs. Norris.

Glancing at her wristwatch, she weighed her options. There was just enough time to sneak in a few more minutes of rest, but she was not confident that it would be reptile-free or restful. Reluctantly, she pulled her cotton sheets smooth and slunk back into the bathroom to prepare for the day ahead.

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As Hermione Flooed into the Leaky Cauldron, she smoothed invisible creases and very visible dust from her robes. She yawned again, running a hand over her errant hair. Deciding that, stuff it, if she was not up to her usual grooming standards, her lack of sleep excused her, she walked out into the alley, tapping impatiently on the bricks. As Diagon Alley was revealed, she noted that it was starting to snow. Grumbling, she pulled the hood of her winter cloak tightly over her head. She had never been a fan of the cold.

Walking quickly over to Flourish and Blott's, she fumbled with the wards before opening the door, noting that she was a good fifteen minutes early. The smell of freshly made tea greeted her, and she smiled as her co-worker, Jillian Blott, raised a cup in greeting. "Morning, Hermione. Gods above, you look like shit."

"Thank you ever so much, Jillian," Hermione responded, smirking a little. Jillian really did have a way of getting straight to the point. "It was that dream again," she explained, hanging her cloak on the rack and tying a neat blue apron around her front.

"Ahh," said Jillian. "The snaky one? Never could stand the scaly buggers m'self, always hissing and slithering. Nothing like dragons. They're straight-forward. Stay away from 'em when they're angry and you won't get cooked." Jillian had been raised on a dragon preserve somewhere in the northeast of Romania. She still couldn't get enough of the beasts.

Hermione chuckled at the appraisal and nodded. She poured herself a cup of tea, absentmindedly adding three cubes of sugar and a good splash of cream. Sipping at the restorative brew, she sighed contentedly and set the cup down. "Aren't we due for a shipment today?"

Jillian nodded, swallowing a mouthful of cake before responding. "Three boxes, should be Flooed in by around ten. I'll need you out front today. Michael can take inventory. Don't forget, I'm skipping out at around eleven. St. Mungo's. We find out the sex today," she said, a huge grin splitting her face as she patted her slightly swollen belly.

Hermione grinned in turn. "Jillian, that's wonderful. And how is Geoffrey taking all of this?" Geoffrey Blott, nephew to half of the store's namesake, was a quiet man. Appropriately, he was an Unspeakable at the Ministry, and hopelessly devoted to his wife.

Jillian chuckled. "He about passed out at our last appointment. He's really taking it well though. We're picking out nursery designs as soon as we move into the new house next week."

Hermione raised an eyebrow at this. Knowing Jillian, she would choose something dragon-themed, regardless of the baby's gender. "Have anything in mind?" she asked, taking another slow sip.

"I was thinking of doing a border of Hungarian Horntails, with some sort of camp at the bottom. Geoff is giving me complete freedom, not that he has much of a choice." Jillian, it went without saying, was a very strong-willed woman, not that Geoff seemed to mind. They reminded Hermione greatly of Mr. and Mrs. Weasley.

Both women turned as the door opened, causing a small bell to chime. Waving in greeting, Michael Summers shook off his thick black cloak before tying on his apron. "Morning, ladies. It sure is coming down out there." His blue eyes crinkled at the corners as he smiled with his perfect mouth. Hermione was sure Jillian had hired him for his good looks. He certainly seemed to draw more customers to his side of the shop.

"Morning, Michael," Hermione responded as Jillian nodded and waved, mouth again full of cake. "How's your mum? I heard she was in hospital. Is everything alright?"

Michael nodded. He wasn't surprised that she had heard. Magical London was a very tightly knit community. "She's fine now. Took a spill from her broom. She should be home within the next day or so."

"I'm sure she'll be back to terrorizing the neighbours in no time," Hermione teased. She patted Michael's arm reassuringly as she smiled at the thought of Agnes Summers. She was a no-nonsense witch, and fiercely independent. She had a sharp tongue and an almost-visible sense of energy that crackled around her. Agnes was single mother with three grown boys, and Hermione admired her immensely.

Following the two petite women into the back of the shop, Michael ran his hand through his dark, wind-ruffled hair. Admittedly, working in close quarters with one of the Golden Trio had been almost intimidating in the beginning. He'd been in his fourth year when she entered Hogwarts, and recalled very little of her before the events of the past few years. Hermione Granger's status in the magical community as a key player in Voldemort's demise, during her seventh year at Hogwarts no less, was something very few, if any, could hope to live up to. Over the past few months, Michael had been relieved to discover that she was a normal enough witch, albeit with a staggering intellect and a fierce sense of loyalty. He truly felt himself growing fonder of her by the day.

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The day passed by in a flurry of customers. The latest bestseller was picked clean from the displays within a matter of hours, and Hermione had a hard time keeping up with operating the till as well as fielding questions from curious customers. She enjoyed it. After so many years of researching late into the night, conspiring with Harry and Ron about how to save the Wizarding world, it was a comfort to know that things could be normal again.

After the Final Battle in her seventh year, Hermione had wondered if things would ever be the same. So many had been lost, but the Wizarding world had gained more. Their freedom. For several months following the skirmish at Hogwarts, the entire magical community had seemed to be trapped in a hazy fog. There were victory celebrations and medals awarded, but most just wanted to move on with their lives. The name Voldemort was still not freely used, but it no longer caused gasps when spoken aloud.

Eventually, the community as a whole began to function normally again. Hogwarts was repaired, as well as receiving a large white memorial beside the lake, honoring the fallen. In Hermione's opinion, too many names were etched along its side. She had traced the names of classmates and fellow Order members, feeling numb. Tonks, Fred Weasley, Hagrid, Justin Finch-Fletchley, Hannah Abbott. The names went on and on, but Hermione had turned away before she could read the most distressing. Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore. His death had been the biggest blow of all.

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Hermione groaned as the last group of customers walked out of the shop. Stretching, she yawned. Pushing a few stray curls out of her face, she patrolled, straightening the shelves and adjusting a few displays. Michael was at the till, adding up the day's profits. Hermione's gasp rose from the row of books on Herbology. Curious, Michael rose from behind the counter. Rounding the corner, he couldn't keep his eyebrows from attempting to reach his hairline. On the floor was a basket, from which various unpleasant hissing noises were being emitted. Both witch and wizard drew their wands, staring down at the innocuous wicker basket. As the pair watched, the basket lurched, causing the lid to fly open.

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**AN:** Oh, it's very odd to be back in the writing saddle again. I hope that I'm not too rusty and that my story has piqued your interest. Thank you to my beta froggiebecky for helping me polish the story. As with all authors, my plea is that you review, review, review.

## A Mystery Emerges

### Chapter 2 of 3

Hermione Granger is trying to live her life after the war as peacefully as she can. One day, a surprise left at her place of employ changes all of that. AU, mild language.

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**AN:** Thank you to everyone who read the first chapter and reviewed, as well as all you silent people. It was awesome to see over 100 hits on the first day this was posted. I have had a lot of things happen in real life over the past few weeks, so I'll be trying my best to post new chapters as often as possible. Also, thanks is due to froggiebecky for being my beta.

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Several things happened at once as the lid to the basket flew open. Michael cast a *Protego* charm as Hermione cast *Stupefy*; a greenish snake fell limply over the side of the basket as another snake, this one brown, continued its escape. Casting another *Stupefy*, Hermione shuddered and took a step back. Michael leaned in, squinting as he examined the snakes. "Boomslangs," he breathed after a moment, running a hand through his dark hair to steady himself. "Whoever left them here must have known how deadly they are."

"Oh, I have no doubt of that," Hermione replied, still shaken. Using her wand, she levitated the snakes back into the basket and cast several locking charms on the lid.

There had not been an attempt on her life in a few months, but she was not naïve enough to believe that there were not still sickeningly loyal supporters of He-Who-Bit-the-Dust out there, biding their time. The last assassination attempt had been a rather clumsily hidden Tripping Jinx lining the top of the stairs at her flat. The remaining Death Eaters were getting sloppy.

Michael noticed how pale Hermione's face was and levitated the basket himself, banishing it into the back office of the shop, locking the door and warding it. Walking back to the front of the store, he put an arm around Hermione, wincing as she flinched. "Come on, let's get some tea on and see if we can't figure out something about this mysterious present."

Hermione accepted the mug of tea, glad that Michael hadn't bothered with Jillian's daintier china set. Her hands were shaking as she took a sip. She couldn't help but wonder at the similarity between the snakes currently locked in Jillian's office and the ones in her dreams. They were small and extremely hard to come by. Native to Africa, they had the deadliest venom of any snake. Whoever had left them in the store had certainly wanted her dead. It felt surreal to realize that even with Voldemort gone, there were still attempts being made on her life.

"So," Michael began, startling the witch sitting across from him. "Know anyone that would want you dead?" Hermione smiled at the weak joke and set her mug down. "Boomslangs are nasty buggers. Expensive too. You have to pay extra since they're smuggled in from Africa and all."

Hermione raised a brow at this.

"Hey," Michael said defensively. "Don't look at me like that. My dad worked with the Department of Magical Creatures before he died. Taught me a lot about the nasty ones when I was little. I thought they were the best bedtime stories in the world."

Hermione smiled at the thought of a much younger Michael, staring up at his dad, pleading with big blue eyes for stories of boomslangs and manticores. "More interesting than the stories I got. All Muggle stories seem to be about princesses being rescued at just the right moment by a valiant prince. Never once heard about a princess rescuing herself." Huffing, she took a too-big gulp of tea, wincing as the liquid burned her throat and made her eyes water.

Michael laughed at that and replied, "I'm sure you're more than capable of rescuing yourself. You did help defeat Voldemort."

Hermione rolled her eyes and waved her hand as if to brush off the compliment. "Harry did more than anyone. Without him, I don't think we could have won."

Michael smirked. "Even so, I wouldn't exactly call Potter a prince." They both laughed at this. If they laughed a little too loudly and a little too long, no one could blame them. They'd just had a near-death experience, after all.

After the pair calmed down, Hermione wiped tears from her eyes. She hadn't laughed like that in a very long time. As she took another sip of her tea, she snuck a look at the man sitting across from her. He really was gorgeous with full lips, dark hair, and pretty blue eyes. He had a stillness to him, a sense of quiet that was utterly lacking in both Harry and Ron. She'd come to appreciate that quality in him over their past few months working together. She needed a calming influence in her life.

Michael hid behind his own mug, looking at Hermione out of the corner of his eye. She really was one of a kind. Brilliant, kind, and compassionate. Her warm brown eyes and halo of brown curls endeared her to him in a way he couldn't explain. As their eyes met, both looked away quickly, Hermione blushing. Michael busied himself clearing away the tea things while Hermione brushed imaginary crumbs from her blue jumper.

Clearing her throat, Hermione said, "We need to find out what we can about the snakes. Where they were purchased, by whom. I'll look through the receipts for today, see if any names jump out."

Michael nodded. "I'll Floo a few of my dad's old mates, see if they know anything about a shipment of boomslangs. I know they're dead expensive, but I'm not sure who's bringing them in these days. Someone in Knockturn Alley, I'm sure."

Hermione agreed absentmindedly, mentally checking through the customers she'd rung up that day. No one particularly suspicious had come in, but that didn't mean anything in the Wizarding world, where potions such as Polyjuice were so readily available. Groaning, she flipped through several receipts before realizing how useless it was. If her would-be assassin had purchased something, it was certainly done with an alias or paid for with a pocketful of Galleons.

Checking her watch, she noted that it was already half past eight. Yawning, suddenly exhausted by the long day, she headed towards the back of the shop. She knew that working late into the night wouldn't get them anywhere if their heads were fogged by sleep and a need for some real food. Leaning against the doorway, she smiled as Michael's head lolled to the side. He'd fallen asleep sitting up and was now snoring quite loudly. Chuckling softly, she poked his shoulder, causing him to jolt awake.

Smiling sheepishly, he rubbed at the back of his neck before stretching. Hermione's eyes found their way drawn to the thick lines of his arms and the broad plane of his chest. She turned away, blushing. "You, uh, fell asleep. I thought that you might want to get something to eat, but I understand if you don't want to because I'm sure you're tired and—"

"Hermione, I'm starved," he cut in smoothly, tactfully not mentioning the fact that she had been babbling nervously. "Let's grab some takeout and bring it back here."

Michael helped Hermione into her cloak before turning off the lights in the store. Grinning, he pulled on his own. He was finally going on a date with Hermione. Well, sort of.

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**AN:** Two notes on this chapter. First, oddly enough, Michael is a canon character, or at least I adopted him from canon. There was a boy in Hufflepuff during *the Goblet of Fire* named Summers. He was one of the boys sent to the Hospital Wing with a beard for trying to cross the Age Line. Also, I found a wonderful picture of Tom Welling, and well, he looks a lot like I imagine Michael. Here's the link: <http://img.photobucket.com/albums/v736/Ravynys/twilightTomWelling.jpg>

## A Quick Bite

### Chapter 3 of 3

Hermione Granger is trying to live her life after the war as peacefully as she can. One day, a surprise left at her place of employ changes all of that. AU, mild language.

Hermione laughed and took another bite of curry as Michael did the same. They were sitting in a quiet corner of a somewhat-local Indian restaurant. Given the late hour, there weren't any other patrons. The only sounds around the couple were the loud rustles and clinks of busboys clearing tables and hushed talking as waitresses compared tips.

Taking a sip of water, Hermione held up a hand. "You're telling me that you were one of the students that got caught trying to cross the Age Line?"

Michael chuckled. "And I paid for it dearly. I was stuck in the Hospital Wing for a week with a beard that would have put Dumbledore's to shame. I wouldn't laugh too hard, Hermione. I seem to remember a certain Gryffindor hidden away with a cat's tail."

Groaning, Hermione attempted to hide her increasingly red face behind her napkin. "How did you know?"

Raising an eyebrow, Michael shook his head. "Gossip traveled fast at Hogwarts. When the Gryffindor know-it-all disappeared, people noticed. I was just impressed that you were able to brew Polyjuice that young. If you were that advanced in Potions, why didn't you stay with it?"

Hermione shrugged. "After Hogwarts, I was just so tired of everything. The stares, the rumors. I just wanted to take a break. That's why I'm still at Flourish and Blott's. It's quiet, and I have the means to complete some of my own research, something I've wanted to do for a long time. There are so many theories I've read about over the past few years. I'd be hard-pressed to pick just one," she said with a self-deprecating laugh.

As Hermione spoke, her cheeks became flushed and her eyes sparkled. Her passion for Potions was evident, and that evidence made Michael shiver. He'd never felt that intensely about anything.

"Anyway," Hermione continued. "After chasing Harry around for so many years, making sure he didn't get into even more trouble, it's nice to have some quiet time. Even if it looks like things won't stay quiet for long."

Michael nodded at the last comment, the mood at the table subtly shifting. "The boomslangs. Hermione, is this the first time..." Not knowing how to finish his thought, Michael trailed off, looking at Hermione with worry in his eyes.

Hermione shifted in her seat, playing with the embroidered edges of the tablecloth. "No, far from it, actually," she replied wearily. "After Voldemort was defeated, I was attacked every few weeks or so. It got so bad that I had a full escort for a few months. Harry and Ron got off easier. It seems that the Death Eaters took my part in the war much more... personally."

"Because you're a Muggle-born," Michael replied softly. Slowly, he reached across the table, startling Hermione by taking her much smaller hand in his. Absentmindedly stroking her palm, he thought for a moment, not noticing Hermione's widened eyes and red cheeks. "We have to go to the Aurors with this."

Hermione shook her head emphatically. "No. Michael, we can't," she pleaded. "If Harry hears about this, he'll never let me out of his sight. I'll be under lock and key with a full guard before we can even explain the situation."

Michael groaned and ran this hand through his hair, mussing it thoroughly. "Even if Potter did react that way, he'd be right. Hermione, if this person was able to attack you at work, they most likely know where you live. It's not safe for you to go home."

Hermione pursed her lips at this. "Michael Summers, if you think for one moment that I am going to stay away from my own flat just because some mad Death Eater wants to kill me, you're sadly mistaken."

Michael raised an eyebrow at her outburst, deciding not to point out the ridiculousness of her statement. "I'm not suggesting you flee the country and change your name. I'm just saying that until we figure out who is behind this, it might be a good idea to stay somewhere else. With a friend."

Hermione snapped her mouth shut, swallowing the tirade she had been building up. Accustomed to years of Harry and Ron rashly jumping into things, she hadn't expected Michael to remain so level-headed. Taking a bite of her now-cold food to cover her moment of hesitation, she grimaced slightly.

"I know that you're right, but I don't have to like it," Hermione said, a small smile on her face.

Michael smirked, wiping his mouth with the small linen napkin. "Do you have someone you can stay with?"

Hermione bit her lip, eyes lowered. "I would ask Harry, but with Ginny due any day now, I don't want to worry them. Ron's off on tour with the Cannons, and Luna and Neville are on an expedition somewhere in Iceland."

Michael frowned and scratched his eyebrow in thought. "I know this is a crazy suggestion, and we don't really know each other that well outside of work, but you could stay with me, at least until we can guarantee your flat is safe." Glancing up at Hermione through lowered lids, Michael noted the thoughtful look on her face. He sighed in relief, glad to know that she was at least considering the suggestion.

Hermione pursed her lips. "Are you sure, Michael? I don't want you to feel as if you're obligated to help me." The questioning, earnest look on her face made Michael's heart skip a beat.

"Hermione, I wouldn't have offered if I wasn't serious," Michael said, gently taking Hermione's hand. "I don't feel obligated. I realize you're in an unwanted situation and staying with me for a week or so is a viable solution, at least temporarily."

Hermione looked down at her hand, engulfed by Michael's. She smiled at the sight. She'd never thought of herself as small or dainty, but seeing his hand wrapped around hers made her heart flutter in a way she couldn't explain. Hermione looked up at Michael through her lashes. He was looking at her with a concerned expression on his face. Oddly enough, it wasn't nearly as irritating as when Harry worried about her.

Sighing, she nodded. "Alright. I'll do it."

**AN:** I know, I know. It was short, but that just means that I'll be able to crank out another chapter within the next week or so. Think of this as sort of an exposition/transition chapter. Thank you to the people that have been reading and reviewing, as well as my wonderful beta, froggiebecky.