

Beneficent Stranger

by Titania Snape

This is a re-do, updated version of my story. Each chapter will be edited and added to before posting to this site. I am seeking to bring more depth to the work, and rely on you, dearest readers, to tell me whether or not I am succeeding. Live long and prosper, Titania

The Letter

Chapter 1 of 3

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Beneficent Stranger

The Letter

Dear Sir,

Well, the moment I have been working toward for the last seven years, has finally arrived!

I am graduating tomorrow. Don't worry I will write you with an account of the day. I couldn't not tell you about it, even if it weren't part of your requirements, for I would have never made it this far had it not been for you.

When my parents were murdered I thought that my life was over. The fact that I had nothing to fall back on financially wasn't even an issue to me at that point, I was so devastated at the loss of them. When I went to the solicitor's office and found out that my parent's had nothing to leave me, the thought of never being able to return to Hogwarts, now my only home at that point, was inconceivable to me. In all honesty sir, and I feel that I can tell you this now, I considered suicide.

Then Professor Dumbledore told me about your offer. On that day I began to hope again. I had something to live for. I had a home! I could continue my studies, stay amongst my friends and my teachers, all of those that I love so dearly.

Even had your weekly letters not been a requirement, I would have found a way to communicate with you somehow. Your influence in my life has been so profound!

The hardest part of all of this has been not knowing who my benefactor was! How can I properly thank you, for you have been so thoughtful of me these last three years? You have given me so much, especially this year, sir.

I know that I thanked you at the time for the beautiful emeralds you gave me for my birthday, and I wear them under my robes still, as you asked me to. I know that I thanked you for the collection of my favorite books, Muggle literature and magical, all bound for me! I still run my hands over the leather and trace my initials with my fingers! Then I find a package on my bed tonight. Oh dearest, your gift to me left me breathless!

It is hanging on my wardrobe door, and I am looking at it now, even as I write. I cannot even begin to tell you how much I love this gift. Your letter says that I should wear it tomorrow for the ceremony and of course I shall. The emeralds will be worn too for the gown sets them off perfectly.

I have never felt such soft silk, nor seen such a beautifully wrought garment. The ivory colour makes me look as beautiful as I feel when I see myself in it. (Yes, I wore it for a full hour, with the jewels and pranced in front of my mirror too!) You have shown me yet again that you really do read what I write, no matter how mundane, or self pitying!

I know that you will be there tomorrow, watching me walk across the platform, to receive my awards. I wonder if you will be brave enough to walk over to me after the ceremony and allow me to thank you in person for all that you have done, for all that you are, and for all that you have been to me.

I know that you disregard my bravery as too "Gryffindor" but, I know that your house possesses a certain amount of bravery too, you merely calculate your moves rather than dive right in as we Gryffindor are wont to do.

I know who you are you see, or at least I think that I do. Rest assured that I shall not be the one to make the first move, that ball lies squarely in your court, sir.

I hope that you will come to me privately, as I am sure you would prefer, so that I can tell you in person the feelings that I hold for you so deep in my heart. They are too personal for me to put on paper for the writing of them does the beauty of them no justice.

Please consider this, my dearest, Beneficent Stranger. I shall await you in the rose garden near the statue of Nimue.

Until then, I remain faithfully yours,

Hermione Granger

Firewhiskey

Chapter 2 of 3

Severus reacts to the letter. Rated for later chapters. Please read and review.

Beneficent Stranger

Chapter Two

Firewhiskey

The firewhiskey went down with a smooth burn that, for the moment, turned his mind from the thoughts that had driven him to the bottle in the first place. He took the time to savor the pain by closing his eyes and drawing shallow breaths. He had to do something, anything, to avoid having to ponder the words he had just read. Yet, the words were already burned into his mind as indelibly as the now dormant mark on his arm.

She had called him "dearest".

It wasn't that the contents of her letter surprised him. It was the certainty of the words on the paper, words that had been unsaid, until now. The letters she had written this year had made subtle references to her growing affection toward him. References he had dismissed as merely the romanticisms of a seventeen going on eighteen year old young woman who, quite naturally, idealized the man who had sponsored her.

The fact that she fancied her unknown benefactor wasn't surprising, for she had relayed to him all of the trials, and tribulations of her adolescence. He knew about her short, romantic relationship with Ronald Weasley, and the lack of interest by the boys of her year after that. He knew that, at times, she had felt as if she were nothing more than resource material to her friends and fellow students. She had written of her envy of what she called, "the pretty girls", although she was always quick to add that she found some of them vacuous and annoying.

In one memorable letter she wrote that she often wished that she had been fortunate enough to be born pretty ~~and~~ smart. He had snorted when he'd read her words, thinking, 'Didn't she know that she was both?'

Then again, that letter had been written after a particularly, "*horrid afternoon spent in double potions, where I had to put up with Professor Snape's purposely ignoring me and Ron's doltish flirtation with Pansy Parkinson*". Professor Snape ignored Pansy's acting up, but took points from Gryffindor, as usual, "*she had written*". "He can really be a bastard sometimes!"

He had been far from offended at her choice of adjective, so far from offended in fact, that he had laughed when he'd read her words. He knew he could act the bastard at times, but old habits die hard. Besides, she had been right in describing the youngest Weasley male's behavior, as doltish.

"*One would think that he might behave in a more evenhanded manner now that V is dead, but no, he still favors those sneaky serpents! Nor does he ever relax! Heaven forbid that he actually relax, or exhibit bad posture, or even dress less like Professor Moriarty. Although, there is something about all of those buttons on that frock coat of his that I find oddly—well. I'd best not write about that, although I don't think that it would shock you in the least. It's just that if Ron or Harry ever got their hands on this letter and read what I just wrote, I'd never hear the end of the teasing! Besides, there is no one whom I admire more than you, my most Beneficent Stranger. I just wish the professor could be more like you, or at least how I imagine you to be.*"

That had gotten his attention. The fact that she had a crush on her nasty Potions master had surprised him, and to some small degree, he was flattered.

Yes, for all of the practicality she exhibited in her school work, he knew that like all women, she desired affection. So, he gave her the affection she desired the only way he was capable of, anonymously. Although, the thought Miss Granger imagining her sponsor as a handsome, wealthy man, had always brought a sad sort of smile to his face. He had always assumed that if she ever found out the truth she would be horrified.

Not that she ever would discover the identity of her benefactor, for the terms of their contract, forbade her from seeking out the identity of her "sponsor". So of course, he had experienced some alarm when she had started telling him that she was trying to figure out who he was. He knew that, once she had set out to accomplish a goal, she would pursue it to completion with dogged determination. In, what he knew now had been a futile effort at distracting her, he had sent her a collection of leather bound

books hoping that they would keep her mind occupied enough to forego her quest.

He should have known better.

He should have seen.

Yet, she had been so clever.

Now he understood the looks she had sent his way this year. Now he understood the changed behavior toward him, the quick, tentative smiles in his direction, all disguised as the respectful glances of a student toward a teacher. He had only vaguely noticed it at the time, but now that he thought upon those moments, he saw the deeper meaning behind her actions. She had known all this time. Known, and had never said a word. Had she confronted him before now, he would have been cutting in his denial

'How positively Slytherin of her,' he thought

He poured himself another drink, with hands that trembled still.

What had started as an act, to assuage the guilt he felt over not being able to prevent the loss of her family, had turned into something deeper.

Her required letters to him had shown him a side of her that he had never seen, one that he found pleasing, and admirable. Her determination to prove the prejudices of their world incorrect, her innate intelligence and maturity, the buoyancy of her soul through the sea of tragedy that one so young should never have had to swim through, had raised his estimation of her in his eyes.

All of this had drawn him in, so subtly, that he was now trapped by it. Somewhere along the way, he had fallen in love with Hermione Granger. An unspoken love, which he had pledged to keep as such, for he had never thought that she would return his feelings.

Until tonight's letter had come.

His heart leapt in his chest, and he drew a deep breath, the inrushing air warming the whiskey that lingered on his tongue. He leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes.

Tomorrow night she would be waiting for him, and he would go to her.

As this was written well before HBP it is absolutely AU. This is a re-do of the story that was originally posted. The premise hasn't changed, I've merely fine tuned the chapters. Please let me know what you think. Live long and prosper, Titania

The Threshold

Chapter 3 of 3

Contrary to popular opinion, Albus Dumbledore, was not omnipresent.

Beneficent Stranger

Chapter Three

The Threshold

Contrary to popular opinion, Albus Dumbledore, was not omnipresent. He was not omniscient. He did not have scrying mirrors located in strategic places throughout the castle. No, he had simply been the Headmaster of a co-educational boarding school for longer than he cared to remember and a professor for even longer. The fact that the portraits liked to gossip was merely an added benefit to his station. Consequently, there were few things that could surprise him.

Two years ago, when Severus Snape had come to him with the offer to sponsor Hermione Granger after the death of her parents, he wasn't surprised. He had rather expected his Potions master to make the offer; it was just the sort of thing that Severus would do. Nor was he shocked by Severus' demand for anonymity, for the professor took great measures to uphold his dark reputation. Some habits were just too hard to break, and everyone knew that Severus Snape was a man of habit, at least temperamentally.

Hermione Granger's acceptance of the offer hadn't surprised him either. She had acted purely out of shock, and when she finally realized what she had done, it was too late to withdraw. Her Gryffindor pride wouldn't allow it. So she went on.

The arrangement had worked. Hermione Jane Granger continued her studies and wrote to her sponsor, as per the terms of the agreement. Albus was grateful for the opportunity to watch one of his most gifted students grow and learn. She had turned out quite well, he thought on more than one occasion as he watched her.

Her trials had helped her to grow, and when other students lost their friends or family, as was wont to happen during the recent terror, she had been the shoulder these students could cry on. She truly knew how they felt, and her words were the sincere words of experience.

That was all in the past now, for the terror was over, and the world was safer. Voldemort had been defeated at the beginning of the term in what he had assumed would be a surprise attack.

Hermione Granger, Albus thought, had fought so bravely at the side of Severus Snape. She was a powerful witch, for her age, and the pair had made a fearsome force. They had been the reason Harry had made it to Voldemort's circle. The three of them, Harry, Severus and Hermione, had cast the final hex as Ron lay injured at the feet of the villainous Tom Riddle.

"I knew it! I told you he was on our side, Harry!" she had exclaimed after they had all gathered in the Great Hall to celebrate. She turned to a stunned looking Harry. "You owe Professor Snape an apology, Harry."

Both men had looked shocked at her words, but Albus hadn't been. Hermione Granger was nothing if not intrinsically fair-minded.

It had taken Harry a little over a fortnight to make the apology, almost as long as it took Severus, to get over the shock he had felt at her words. The two would never be the best of friends, there were too many bridges burnt between them for that, but they wouldn't kill each other. Albus decided he could live with the frosty, if civilized, relations between the pair.

Time marched on and school continued. Love affairs were begun and ended. Celebratory parties were thrown, and honors were bestowed on those who deserved them. Including Severus Snape. He, at last, could wake up in the mornings truly free of the burdens he had carried for so very long. Albus had been the happiest he had ever been. Life was good again.

During the course of the year, Harry, Ron and Hermione had decided what they wanted to do with their lives. None of their choices had surprised him either.

Harry had decided to take some time to enjoy life. Now that he was no longer required to live with his mother's family, he decided to stay on at Hogwarts after term ended. This decision pleased all parties. The Dursleys were thrilled because they wouldn't have to support the young wizard anymore and thus avoid the risk of their neighbors learning the true nature of their ward. Albus was pleased because he would have Harry at his side for a time. Perhaps he could show the boy what life in a loving home was truly like.

Besides, he deserved the rest. He deserved to live a life where he chose the course, as opposed to living up to a prophecy cast before his birth.

Ronald Weasley had chosen mediwizardry as a career. This shocked those whom had been betting that the young Mister Weasley would enroll in the Ministry's Auror School. Albus thought that the redhead would be very suitable as a mediwizard. Even his Potions grade attested the fact.

Hermione Granger surprised every one but himself and, Albus suspected, Severus Snape with her choice. She had decided to put off further education in favor of traveling the world. She had said she needed the break. Harry and Ron had been nearly apoplectic with shock, as had her professors, but all failed to persuade her to change her mind.

"No, Fawkes," Albus said as he stroked his familiars feathers. "Nothing surprises me anymore. Except for this development, of course."

The phoenix merely nuzzled his master's hand in reply.

"Although, I must say that I am quite pleased. Yes, I would rather it have happened a little later. Perhaps a few years from now when Miss Granger was done with her travels would have been more suitable. I had actually thought that they might perhaps meet one day, suddenly, at Diagon Alley and 'hit it off' as the Muggles say."

Albus walked to his chair and sat himself down. With a satisfied sigh, he reached across the desk and lifted the lid from a candy dish.

"No," he said, as he selected a candy and popped it into his mouth. "Miss Granger's invitation to Nimue is not in the least bit unexpected for I've read her letters to you. I think that it's the fact that Severus intends to accept her invitation that surprises me.

I hadn't expected him to declare himself so soon. I had rather thought that her age would throw him off."

Fawkes looked askance at the bearded wizard. 'And you thought that you knew Severus,' the bird thought.

"Don't look at me in that tone, Fawkes." Albus scolded in a playful voice. "Perhaps I shouldn't be so amazed. Perhaps, Severus is ready to live life again. You know, as well as I do, that Hermione Granger is no ordinary eighteen-year-old woman. She will do him good, I think, and he will certainly do her some good. After all, too much study and too little play makes for a very dull Miss Granger. And a very dull Severus Snape for that matter. Besides, it's not as if they aren't suited for each other, for I have never known two people to be so much alike, yet so opposite. Yes, they are exactly what each other needs."

Fawkes would have arched an eyebrow, had he one to arch; instead he glanced at one of the clocks on Albus' desk.

"I know, Fawkes," the wizard sighed as he rose from his chair. "It's time to be getting ready for the commencement ceremony. We must start on time, you know, for we wouldn't want to keep the students waiting. Nor, Severus and Miss Granger, for that matter.

~*~

The wizened countenance of Albus Dumbledore smiled down at the upturned faces before him and marveled at how quickly time can pass. Next to the first day of term, this was his favorite time of year.

First year students always walked through the doors of the Great Hall wearing expressions that ranged from terrified to excited. Every year, his seventh year students, on the evening of their commencement, wore the very same expressions. Even though nearly all of them were of age, and to a person, thought themselves grown up. Albus likened graduation and their entry into the adult world to that of the first year students crossing the lake on their first night.

"In a way, it is really the same. Each of you, deny it though you might, felt some fear. A small sliver of doubt at your abilities, at your readiness, to enter this school. It is only natural that you feel the same upon leaving it. You feel sad and happy at the same time, and it's very confusing.

But know this, each of you hold within yourselves the talent and ability to succeed at what ever you set your mind to. You have time and youth on your side. Do not squander it. Use it. Use it to find your path. Use it to make a good and fulfilling life for yourselves.

Yet, you mustn't forget to enjoy your youth as well. Do not become so wrapped up in your work or studies that you forgo the opportunity to have fun when fun is beckoning you. Take the time to smell the roses, literally and figuratively. To that end, it is my wish to gift each of you with a single rose from Hogwarts' rose garden."

He waved an arm over the top of the dais and with a small *woosh* red flowers appeared on each of their laps. Some of the Slytherins looked upon the flowers with curled lips, which drew a patient smile from their Headmaster. Everyone else looked amazed.

"It is enchanted to live forever; it will never lose its scent. I hope that you will take care of it, and keep it where you can see and enjoy it. It is my wish that when you find the challenges of life overwhelming, that you will remember to stop, and take moment to smell the rose. Now that the war is over, there is too much to live for. There is so much to strive for and so much that you can make better. Most of all, there is a life out there for you to enjoy."

He paused and smiled, watching as some lifted the blooms to their noses and inhaled. He was gratified to see that even some of the Slytherins, after glancing at their neighbors, did the same.

"Now, I shall not run on with this speech. I know that you are all anxious to commence with the commencement so that the after party can begin. When Professor McGonagall calls your name, please come and take your seat so that the Sorting Hat can send you on your way back through the doors you entered seven years ago."

And so the ceremony commenced. No one knew what the hat would say, for that was between the hat and the wearer. It was only known that it would give the graduate what that young man or woman needed to take away with them.

AN: I love Southern_Witch_69! She rocks!