

Intangible

by kizzy7

Just why did Severus ask Hermione to be his Potions assistant?

one-shot

Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N This was written for aleysiasnape on HPCon_Envy on livejournal. She prompted me with, 'Hermione's first day as Snape's Potions assistant.' And then anonymous_plume asked me so nicely to continue it, and this is the result. Warning for unashamed fluff, git!Ron, and a thoroughly pathetic Snape. Thanks as always to the admins at TPP.

Severus smoothed the tip of his wand over the jagged scars that mottled his neck. He had not yet discovered a potion to completely eradicate the damage wrought, but powerful glamours had so far successfully concealed the wounds.

For she was going to be here soon, and he would ~~not~~ have her staring and... pitying.

He nodded as the hard, ugly knots of flesh disappeared beneath smooth skin before turning to once again survey his lab. Everything was, as always, straightened, marked, bagged, and tagged.

Uncertainty flickered in his chest. Why had he asked her here?

A knock, foolishly loud and insistent, interrupted his self-examination, and he flicked his wand to open the door. She peeped her head around the corner, her eyes wide. Even her hair exuded an air of nervousness.

"Sir?" she called tentatively.

He cleared his throat. "Even *you*, Miss Granger, cannot hope to learn potion-making from the door. Do enter." His voice was cold and properly emotionless. Good.

Severus listened to her footsteps as she rounded the corner. At the sight of her, his mind jolted from something much like discontinuity. He had ridiculously expected a Hogwarts uniform with Gryffindor trim, and her ragged jeans and plain tank top seemed... wrong. Tendrils of flyaway hair framed her face, and her lips were tight and pursed. She blinked rapidly when she saw him. Severus grasped his worktable to steady himself.

The last time he had seen her was at the Ministry's foolish awards ceremony where she had worn a long, strapless black gown and had kissed his cheek and trailed her lips down to the vicious scars at his throat.

"Well, sir," she said, crossing her arms to hug herself, "where do I begin?"

Grabbing a long, pewter stirring rod from the shelf, he churned a boiling cauldron several times, his grip firm and sure. "You will begin at the beginning, Miss Granger."

She placed an overly large and reddish-purple book bag on his floor. "But... I know the beginning stuff, Professor. From your classes at Hogwarts."

"And I will determine how precisely you remember everything I ever said, Miss Granger. Now, storing and preparing ingredients. Let's see how well you do." He gestured at several shelves stuffed with ingredients, wondering if she would remember that monkfish could not be stored next to fairy dust, or that bat wings should be stacked horizontally to prevent damage, and knowing with a burst of completely irrational pride that she would.

They worked steadily, quietly, for an hour. He couldn't help but look at her, studying the way she bent her arms to reach the highest shelf and the way she would smile when she discovered a trap. Once, she laughed lightly and muttered something too quiet for him to hear. He froze in place, waiting and waiting for her to repeat it.

She was altogether quite... fascinating.

When Hermione paused to pull her hair back into a rough bun, she glanced expectantly at him. Severus knew...he knew...what she was going to ask, and he still did not have an answer for her.

"Professor Snape?"

"Miss Granger," he responded slowly. His heart was pounding fiercely, and he was thinking *She's just a girl, just a girl. Dammit, Snape, you've lived through two wars, faced more than she can even imagine. What... what is it about her that has you so... trapped?*

"I was just wondering..." she continued, trailing off uncertainly. She raised an arm to wipe her forehead, and it was then that he noticed.

A small, golden band, looped irrevocably round her left ring finger.

Inexplicably, he clutched his wand.

"Anyways," she tried again, colour staining her cheeks. "I was just wondering why you offered this position to me. I am very happy you did...I've always wanted to work in potions...but why?"

He couldn't register what she was saying because the light in the room glinted cruelly off of her ring. "Wh...what ring is that, Miss Granger?" Inwardly, he cursed himself both for stuttering and the weakly desperate tone to his voice.

"Oh, this?" She touched the band thoughtfully. "Well, my engagement band, I guess. I mean, I think that's what Ron meant.... Sometimes, he is dreadfully difficult to understand," she explained. "He... babbles."

"Ah," Severus replied. "So you are to marry Mr. Weasley, then."

A small but unmistakable glimmer of distaste flashed across her features. "Yes," she responded shakily.

"Pure marital bliss, I am sure. I offer my condolences," he said wryly.

She laughed, smiling at him so widely and so purely that he felt a bit bewitched. "You never answered my question, sir."

He tapped his fingers on the smooth surface of his worktable, considering. "Why do you think I offered this position to you, Hermione?" Her given name slipped smoothly from his tongue, and he felt terribly smug when she didn't even notice.

"Ron says... Ron says you've some misguided seduction planned, sir," she said, her voice low.

He crossed the room to stand directly in front of her. "What do *you* believe, Hermione?" he asked hoarsely. Their eyes met, and tension snapped sharply between them. Severus wanted to touch her, wanted to trace the path of her nose and run his thumb along her lips.

"I don't know, Severus," she finally said.

"Nor do I," he answered her truthfully.

She opened her mouth as if to say something, but shook her head. Grabbing her book bag, she glanced back at him tentatively, her mouth pulled into an enchanting half-smile. "I've got to go, but I'll see you tomorrow?"

He nodded, catching another glimpse of the golden ring marring her left hand.

Ron says you've some misguided seduction planned, sir, she had said. He couldn't help but curl his thin lips into an unattractive grin.

For never did he imagine he would take advice from Ronald Weasley.

Seduction, as it turned out, was much harder than Severus ever imagined.

He had tried wooing her with the deepest, darkest timbres of his voice. He had attempted several sexy quirks of his left eyebrow. Last week, he had even bought and arranged a lovely vase of flowers, left for her on her worktable. She had promptly mistaken them for potion ingredients, subsequently chopping and storing the colorful daisies.

The worst part was that he still was completely, regretfully, and altogether fully fascinated with her.

Even now, as she was delicately slicing flobberworms into precise, horizontal segments, he was fascinated. Her face was scrunched in concentration, her nose crinkled, her lips slightly downturned. Her hair frizzed out around her face, a result of the ever-present steam in the air, a phenomenon that she openly loathed and he secretly enjoyed. Even her wrist, rising and falling neatly with the blade, charmed him immeasurably.

"Ah, done, Severus. What next?"

He was still mesmerised with her tiny, lightly freckled wrist, and she had to repeat the question two times before Severus, blinking rapidly, responded.

"Miss Granger," he finally said, darkening his brow, "I believe I asked you to quarter those flobberworms, not halve. You've just managed to create unnecessary work for me, you foolish girl."

Anger twisted her face...*so damn cute*, thought Severus...and she pounded her knife on the table with extra emphasis. "You know what, Professor Snape? I don't... I don't understand you at all. And don't worry...any 'unnecessary work' I've created, I'll remedy myself. So you can just go back to your empty house and do whatever it is that you do that makes you such a lonely, bitter man!"

She was huffing now...shaking with the exertion born of her tirade, and Severus forced himself to control the emotion boiling beneath his calm exterior. He wanted to hex her, wanted to scream that if he was such a lonely, bitter man, it was her fault...*her* fault...for being so goddamn, fucking fascinating. It was her fault that he spent most of his nights swirling decanters of Firewhisky, imagining her brown eyes...brown flecked with cool amber that sparkled when she laughed...and what it would be like to kiss her

and touch...

Hermione released her tight grip on the small paring knife in her hand, and she let out a strangled noise halfway between a sob and a laugh. "This is not at all how I planned for today to go, Severus.... It's Friday. I was going to see if you wanted to go out to dinner."

Severus could neither quantify nor explain the physical effect her words had on him. His heart pounded and pounded fiercely in his chest, and he felt as if he were somehow outside of himself, and something entirely alien was controlling his body and his voice.

"Dinner, Miss Granger," he purred, thinking, *Yes, yes, seduction!* "I believe that would be... acceptable."

She smiled and came towards him, holding out a hand as if she wanted to touch him, pausing in the air. He stepped closer to her; he could feel the heat from her body next to him, her fingers curled undecidedly between them. She was smiling still, smiling when she lightly trailed her fingers across his Glamoured neck and then beneath his stiffly starched white collar.

Again, an alien, unseen force compelled him to touch her, and so he brushed his fingers across her cheek, circling his thumb across her chin, moving infinitesimally closer to her bottom lip. She gasped, and her roving fingers stilled on his collarbone.

"Hermione," he said in a strangled whisper. And he wondered if she wanted him *todo* something, to resolve the tension between them. He tilted his chin uncertainly towards hers, but he wasn't sure, for what if she did love Weasley? What if this...her fingers on his skin and the light shining in her eyes and the smile brilliant across her face...was all from pity?

The moment, seemingly frozen in time and space, eventually passed, and she withdrew her hand from him with a small smile. An unreadable emotion flickered across her face, and she laughed nervously. "So... dinner?"

"Dinner," he agreed, and the skin on his neck still tingled from her touch.

She twisted the golden band on her finger, biting her bottom lip. "I'm glad," she said softly. "Ron has been wanting to talk with you."

It was a very good thing that Severus Snape had spent most of his life as a spy, for only that saved him from sure humiliation. "Mr... Weasley?"

Hermione nodded. "Yes, my fiancée. Want to meet at Hitchcocks? Let's say around seven?"

She was out the door before he could properly form an answer in his mind.

At ten minutes to seven, what had previously seemed as an insurmountable obstacle now appeared as an unexpected blessing. Mr. Ronald Weasley was anything but terrifying...unless, that is, one were deathly afraid of bumbling antics and foolish, asinine remarks. As a student, Weasley had been one of his worst...not smart enough to get by without trying, and much too lazy to bother trying. Yes, perhaps this evening would be exactly what he...and Hermione...needed. The contrast would be startling. She would surely realise his own superior intelligence, wit, and perhaps even looks, if he could get this fucking tie on right.

He stepped back to survey himself in the mirror, something he rarely did, but tonight, he appeared somewhat... satisfactory. The dark red shirt matched nicely with his grey slacks, and the deep blue tie added contrast. He tightened the knot of his tie, twisting his neck to survey his wounds. Un-glamoured, for tonight. She had always seemed somewhat captivated by his ugly scars, and tonight, they would hopefully enhance his image as the sexy, brave, and dark hero.

He Apparated to the Hogsmeade restaurant, entering with a confident stride. The seating hostess, petite, dark-haired, and red-lipped, curled several menus in her arms and smiled widely at him.

"Just one tonight, sir?"

Severus shook his head, his eyes roving around the room for any sign of bushy hair. "Um, no. I am meeting..."

"Oh, yes," the hostess interrupted. "Mr. and Mrs. Weasley mentioned you. If you'll follow me?"

"Excuse me," he said coldly. "But I am meeting *Miss* Hermione Granger and her *temporarily* affianced, I believe."

A puzzled expression clouded the hostess' face. "Yes... of course."

He did not at all like this seating hostess, he decided as he followed the click-clack of her heels to a corner booth. She politely placed a menu on the table and gestured at his seat.

Severus scowled at her before taking his seat and turning his attention to the couple that sat mockingly across from him.

Hermione was quite simply... beautiful. She was wearing a light, summery dress that Severus wanted to run his fingers over, her hair was a mass of crazy curls, and she was smiling at him, her eyes darting continually from his face to his tie to his scars. She leaned forward, drumming her nails on the tabletop.

"Severus," she breathed. "You look nice."

He nodded, suppressing the urge to grin like a fool. "As do you, Hermione,"

Ron, who Severus had almost not noticed, cleared his throat loudly, looking between his fiancée and his former Potions professor with an unfathomable gleam in his eyes.

"We are both happy you could join us tonight... Severus," Ron said uncomfortably, patting Hermione's hand. "I've been wanting to thank you for offering her the Potions apprenticeship. She... she's happy."

Severus nodded curtly as Hermione smiled at Ron and promptly removed her hand from beneath his.

"Well, I've ordered us an appetizer," Hermione said. "Do you like calamari, Severus?"

"I do, yes," he replied.

Ron yawned widely. "They make these amazing chips here, with tons of cheese and bacon, but... Hermione doesn't like them."

"Indeed," was Severus' cool answer.

Hermione grinned awkwardly. "You know, I think I'll go to the loo before the food comes. Excuse me, Ronald. Yes, move out of the booth, please."

Severus watched her walk away, the blue fabric of her dress swaying enticingly from her hips. He directed his gaze back to Ronald Weasley, who was currently dragging his fork across the tabletop.

"Listen," Ron finally said, though he did not look up. "Hermione... Well, she talks about you a lot."

Severus smirked, running his fingers through his hair in what he hoped was a nonchalant manner.

"And I was just wondering..." Ron continued, finally looking up to meet Severus' gaze. Worry, confusion, and perhaps... pain reflected in Ron's eyes. "I was wondering if... Man to man, Severus. Is anything going on between you and Hermione?"

The question was unexpected, as was the maturity with which the brash Mr. Weasley was handling the situation. And Severus felt two things at the query...an overwhelming desire to know what *exactly* Hermione had said about him, and an unanticipated pity for the wretched Mr. Weasley.

Before Severus could answer, Hermione returned, settling into the booth next to her fiancée. "I hope you two are getting along?" she asked brightly.

"Oh, just peachy, 'Mione," Ron said sullenly, crossing his arms and slouching into the corner.

"Ronald!" Hermione whispered angrily. "You promised you wouldn't be like this!"

"Well, I can't help it, Hermione! I mean, a man can only take so much!"

He shot her a petulant scowl, and gone were Severus' mistaken thoughts about his maturity.

"Here we are!" a waitress interrupted cheerily, placing a large plate of fried calamari in the center of the table. "Enjoy! Can I get you anything else?"

"Yes," Ron responded. "I want some of those chips. And the largest Firewhisky you have. And if you could perhaps find my dignity somewhere behind the bar, then I'll take that as well."

The waitress left hurriedly, tittering uncomfortably as she retreated.

Hermione grabbed a piece of calamari, shoving it determinedly into the accompanying sauce, and laughed somewhat shrilly. "So, Severus. What are your plans for the future? Going to return to Hogwarts, or..."

"Ah, trying to see how much money he'll make so you can make an educated choice, Hermione. You always were thorough in your research," Ron said bitterly, slouching over the table.

Severus shot Ron a disparaging look. "Mr. Weasley," he said icily. "I assure you that the relationship between Miss Granger and myself has been purely professional. Although, having witnessed this little... temper tantrum, I am even at a greater loss as to why she is marrying you. Have you ever considered, Weasley, that it is *your* ring she wears around her finger? And that it is *you* she comes home to every night? Or are you still too bloody stupid to truly appreciate her intelligence, her beauty, her confidence, even her hair, and the way her eyes glitter when she laughs. The way she tilts her head when she is considering something. Do you even know how fucking lucky you are? Or do you just spend your time feeling irrationally sorry for yourself?"

He knew about mid-way through his tirade that he was giving it away...the secret that resided so strongly in his heart. But he didn't care. Rising, he threw his napkin onto the table, nodding at Hermione, who was seemingly frozen in place at the table.

"Thank you for the invitation to dinner, Miss Granger. I'll see you on Monday."

He left without looking back.

It was either very late or very early when Severus heard knocking at his door...loud, annoyingly insistent knocking, and he knew immediately that it was her. What she meant by coming to his house at this hour...when it was dark and the world slept...he didn't know.

"Come in," he called, unwilling to leave his place by the fire.

He heard his door creak open, and he heard her tentative steps crossing the room, and he felt her standing warm and real next to him.

"Severus," she said quietly.

"What?" he replied

She sat down next to him, but still he did not look at her. For in the end, he had humiliated himself, and in the end, she was still going to marry Weasley.

"Severus," she repeated, placing her hand atop his knee. "Did you... did you really mean that? Everything you said tonight. Did you really mean it?"

Finally, he flicked his eyes towards her. She was still wearing the same light blue dress, and her hair was still wildly down around her shoulders. Her cheeks were blotchy and streaked, as if she had been crying, and she was here, she was with him, now and in his darkened house.

"What does it matter?" he asked roughly.

"It matters," she whispered, entwining her fingers with his own. It was then that he noticed...her ring, her hideous, horrible golden ring...was gone, missing from her hand.

"Your ring!" he exclaimed.

"It's gone, Severus. I should never... I should have broken it off with Ron long ago, when I first realised that... that I was in love with you."

Moments passed, moments in which Severus would later describe in dreamlike terms. Because she leaned forward, and strands of her hair tickled his nose, and her lips were close to his, and she whispered, "Kiss me, Severus."

And with firelight playing on her lovely, lovely features, he did.

Early morning light trickled through the windows of his room, and with a sleepily muttered spell, he shut the curtains. Hermione mumbled something unintelligible and wound her leg around his, curling against his chest with a slow, satisfied smile. Severus blinked, stroking her hair, leisurely awakening with Hermione in his arms.

He was, he had to admit, completely, ridiculously... happy.

"I'm glad it worked," he murmured.

"Hmmm... What, Severus?"

"My plan."

Hermione pressed a flutter of light kisses onto his chest. "What plan?"

"To seduce you."

"Seduce me?" she asked, amusement tingeing her voice, and he could feel the curve of her lips against his skin. She laughed, softly and happily. "Seduce me. I... I didn't realise."

"Hey!" he said, almost affronted except he was really too happy to be bothered. "It worked, didn't it?"

"Yes," she replied, kissing him warmly on the mouth. "I suppose it did, you adorable, adorable man."

Adorable, he thought as he kissed her in return and firmly wrapped his arms around her, stroking the deliciously naked curve of her back until she shivered.*can live with that.*
