

Freeze Your Balls Off

by ApollinaV

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Written from drabble prompt by ladyinthecloak for Sat Night TPP drabbles.

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Hermione's face was completely blank as she awaited the punch line.

"So, 'Mione," Forge said.

"What do you think?" Gred finished.

Hermione blinked, waiting again for the punch line before slowly shaking her head. "You're serious about this?" she enunciated, looking across the table to Severus for help, or at least some indication that they were kidding. Severus rolled his eyes, a gesture that had become common since the wizard had taken up employment from the twins.

"Of course!" they replied in unison.

She buried her face in her hands.

"You do realize," her muffled voice said in distress, "how unbelievably bad this will be? *You're a joke shop.*"

It was the twins' turn to stare and blink. Gritting her teeth, Hermione looked up from her mess of curls and ground out, "So nobody will believe they'll actually get sent to Antarctica! You'll be sued within seconds!"

"That's why—"

"It says—"

"One way Portkey to Antarctica—"

"On the box."

She took in their earnest faces, their smiling brown eyes, and gave up with a groan. When she had taken them on as clients in her fledgling law firm, she had known they

were going to be a handful, but Hermione now knew first-hand that they were more trouble than they were worth. And 'Freeze Your Balls Off – One-way Portkey to Antarctica' was further proof of that.

"Have you ever been to Antarctica?" she tried again. Both boys shook their heads. "Just as I thought. So let me clue you in on something. It's the coldest place on earth. The average temperature in Antarctica hovers somewhere around *negative* nineteen degrees Celsius. The average temperature in England, only thirteen degrees Celsius. Anyone activating one of those Portkeys is likely to die of exposure before they can even say *There's no place like home.*"

"Cor!"

"Blimey!"

Severus snorted, and she shot him a dirty look. He at least knew better.

"That's the last time we get anything from Dung," one of the boys said to his twin.

"Mundungus!" Hermione screeched, causing all males to wince. "What have I said about buying from him!" Ever since the infamous 'Tomato Escapade' his name was verboten around Hermione.

"But 'Mione, he got them legal," one hastily explained.

"The Ministry Portkey office had made a bunch of 'em –"

"But they never sold!"

"Threw 'em out, they did."

Slowly Hermione rose from her seat, the bench scraping across the floor as she glared at them. Tersely Hermione spoke, her lips barely moving. "I warned you. I swore I'd quit if you ever dealt with him again." Belatedly the twins had the decency to blush and look ashamed. "I spent three weeks!" she growled, "three weeks as a fucking tomato because of that dumpster-diving degenerate."

Her eyes were livid and burned brightly. Swiftly grabbing her cloak, Hermione made her way towards the back door of the Burrow. With a loud, "I quit!" she slammed the door behind her and stepped into the swirling snow. Seconds later the crack of Apparition was heard.

Stunned, the remaining members of Weasley Wizarding Wheezes fell silent.

"We need her," Fred stated simply. "The bird is right nutters, but she's brilliant. Did *you* know what the average temperature of Antarctica was?"

"I didn't even know the average temperature of England, mate," George returned.

Severus rubbed his palm slowly across his chin, feeling the day's stubble prickle the skin. Now was quite possibly the time for him to jump ship, too. As grateful as he was that they'd hired him, Severus honestly wasn't sure if he could continue working for them without her presence. She was the best part of his day, and about the only perk worth having, because certainly the forty-percent employee discount wasn't a perk.

"Snake," one of the boys said seriously, dropping all pretenses at comedy. "You know how to talk to her. She even listens to you. You think you could talk to her?"

"Lure her back?"

Severus grunted noncommittally, still mulling over his options. There was a paltry amount in savings, but his lab had been carefully rebuilt.

"There's a ten percent raise if you can do it."

Moments later Severus arrived at the door to her flat. The lights were on and her familiar was sitting in the window, his golden eyes staring at him as if he'd been waiting for Severus to appear. It took several knocks before she answered her door, dressed in an oversized Gryffindor bathrobe and holding a container of ice cream.

"I was sent to fetch you," he confessed. "Even offered a raise to bring you back."

"Oh? How much?" Hermione asked, padding softly into the living room. She took a seat on the sofa and Severus was presented with a dilemma. Did he sit near her where he'd have the opportunity to touch her – perhaps for the last time? Or at a reasonable distance in the chair?

"Ten percent," he answered, sitting next to her.

She chuckled wearily and set the melting ice cream down. "I'm not coming back. I swore when I was tomato-red and bloated that if they ever defied me again I'd walk."

Severus nodded curtly, his lank hair skimming the underside of his jaw. "I don't blame you, Hermione. I'd quit if I thought I could find employment elsewhere."

She looked up at him, her eyes wide and open, an expression of sadness and inexplicable longing in them. It was most discomforting. Severus moved to get up, the proximity to her shattering his nerves; she was too close. His heart was pounding. He could feel her body heat at his side and inhale her warm scent.

"Don't," Hermione whispered, stilling him. She tilted her head back in invitation. Without thinking, Severus' lips met hers. They were soft and tender and parted instantly allowing him to taste her sweetness and heat. She filled his arms and clung to him, drawing him closer.

When they broke for breath, Hermione murmured, "You'll need a twenty percent raise."

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ORIGINAL PROMPT: Hermione, Antarctica, Tomato.

Much love and schmooches to Christev for kindly beta'ing this.

Thank you for reading! AV