Bittersweet

by DarkFate

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Thanks to my wonderful beta, AmyLouise!

"Very well, Headmistress, I'll see you at dinner," Hermione said, opening the door to the office and getting ready to leave.

"How many times do I need to tell you to call me Minerva, my dear?" the headmistress scolded gently.

"Must've slipped my mind again, Min," Hermione laughed.

"Mmhmm, I'm sure. Well, off you go now then, and do send my love to little Dante."

"Of course. Good day, Minerva," Hermione said before closing the door as she left.

Smiling softly, she began to make her way down the staircase when suddenly she felt a jolt almost like a mild electrical shock. Shaken by the seemingly random pulse,
Hermione turned and headed back up the stairs.

Knocking lightly on the door, she pushed it open without waiting for an answer. "Sorry to bother you again, Min, but the strangest thing just..." she trailed off, breath
catching in her throat as she stared into the office.

"Happened," she finished belatedly.

Three surprised faces stared back at her. Confusion and surprise were written plainly across two of the faces, but the owner of the third face gazed at her in a
dispassionate manner.

Her eyes flitted between the two men in the room, shock and surprise mounting with each shift of her eyes. She spared a glance for the woman in the room, yet her gaze
was invariably drawn to the face of the third person, like a compass to north. Her shock was so great, she hardly dared to breathe, or blink for that matter, afraid that if she
should close her eyes even for a millisecond he would disappear.

"Perhaps you are unfamiliar with common customs, but one generally waits for permission before entering a room when one knocks," he drawled sarcastically.

An unintelligible sound accompanied by a pained gasp escaped her lips when she heard his voice. The smooth tone caused her heart to constrict painfully as tears welled
unbidden in her eyes.

"Are you hard of hearing, woman? Who are you?" he pressed, sounding far more intimidating this time.

Pressing her lips together for a moment, she breathed in deeply, letting out a shaky breath before tearing her gaze away from his dark eyes to rest on the aged face that peered at her from behind the desk. Composing herself, she squared her shoulders and turned completely so she was standing in front of the desk.

"I believe we have a rather large problem, Albus, one that should be rectified as soon as possible," she said formally.

"Is that so? Well, since you appear to know all of us, why don't you tell us who you are, dear?" he asked kindly, his eyes sparkling in an inquisitive manner behind his glasses.

"I'm not sure that would be the best course of action. Perhaps you could tell me what year this is?" she countered.

"It is September 12th 1996. Now I have answered your question, I would appreciate it if you could answer mine."

"If you insist, but don't say I didn't warn you," she cautioned, startled by this new-found information.

"Well, go on then, woman; we don't have all day," Severus snapped impatiently.

Sighing quietly, she said, "All three of you already know me, though not as I am now. My name is Hermione, and I believe in this time, I should be in my fifth year."

This statement was met with a gasp of shock from Minerva, a cough of surprise from Severus, and a look of genuine astonishment from the Headmaster.

"Surely you are mistaken, my dear," Albus said. "This is simply not possible!"

"No, Albus, I believe you mean to say that this is simply not *probable*," Hermione corrected.

"You are... Granger?" Severus asked disbelievingly.

"Essentially, yes, though I have not been addressed by my maiden name for many years," she said somewhat sadly.

"Hmph, Weasley, then, is it?" he asked, voice dripping with scorn.

"Oh, heavens, no!" she exclaimed laughingly. "Lord, if I married Ron, I probably would have had an aneurysm by now! Don't get me wrong, I love him to pieces, but we wouldn't survive a week as a couple, let alone years."

"I told you it would never happen," Minerva said to Albus triumphantly.

"Well, given what we have seen at this point, it seems perfectly plausible," he defended.

"If you two have finished gossiping... just how *did* you get here, Miss Granger? For that matter, what time do you come from?" Severus asked.

She brutally suppressed the tears that threatened to fall before replying in a strained voice, "I have not been 'Miss Granger' for many years; I would appreciate it if you called me Hermione. As for what time I came from, it is the year 2016."

"Dear Merlin, child, do you mean to say you are from *twenty* years in the future?" Minerva asked in shock.

"Yes, Minerva, that is precisely what I am saying."

"Well, that certainly explains why you are so very altered from the child we know now in this time," Albus remarked calmly.

Hermione merely nodded in affirmation of what he said. This situation was becoming stranger and more complicated every minute. In so many ways, this was both a blessing and a curse. Suddenly, she wondered if all this had happened when she was in her fifth year. She couldn't remember anything of the sort, but she was also well aware just how many secrets and lies Albus had told during his tenure as Headmaster. She was now able to see that, while some of Albus' manipulations were not entirely necessary, many of his machinations were vital to the war effort. It didn't make it right, but at least now she could understand some of what he had done. It was only in her last year of school that she really grasped the fact that Albus too was human and prone to errors of judgement.

"I see," he said quietly before musing aloud, "I suppose the look of shock on your face upon seeing me is because I am no longer alive in your time."

Hermione averted her eyes and shifted slightly. It was awkward in the extreme to be asked such a question, for that is what it was. Albus Dumbledore did not muse aloud unless he wanted to gain a response or reaction. Unsure of whether or not it would be wise to answer, Hermione held her tongue and hoped he would change the subject. Luck was not with her today, apparently.

"Well, my dear? Am I correct in my presumption?"

"I am not certain it would be wise to discuss the events of the future, Albus," Hermione replied in a neutral tone.

"Ordinarily, I would agree, my dear, but these are most definitely *not* ordinary circumstances. I am well aware of the risks, but I think a few, somewhat general, questions would not hurt as long as you do not reveal any specific dates or places where events occur."

Sighing quietly, Hermione relented. "I forgot how insistent you could be... but yes, Albus, in the year 2016 you are no longer among the living. I'm sorry."

"Hmm, oh, that's quite all right, my child. No reason for you to apologize, I am already an old man, and I have lived my life in full, my dear. My death in the near future is inevitable; one cannot live forever."

"Nevertheless, it was still a great loss for our world. If it is of any consolation, you were greatly mourned. It was a sad day for the Wizarding world, sir."

"Thank you, my dear, though I am sorry to have caused pain to anyone," he replied sincerely.

"As you say, Headmaster, it is inevitable," she agreed.

Suddenly, she heard the question she had dreaded since entering the room.

"Am I to assume that, since you gave me an equally obvious look, I too do not survive the next twenty years?" Severus asked harshly. There was a note of morbid curiosity in his tone that was not completely masked by the scathing bluntness of his question.

Turning slowly, Hermione faced him. It was as though laying eyes on him took away all her willpower. Once she saw his face, it was as though she could not bear to look away. It was like looking into the Mirror of Erised for Hermione. The tears she had managed to contain earlier suddenly leaked forth and trailed down her face unhindered. She was beyond words at this point and, unable to lie to him, nodded stiffly.

The others seemed confused by her reaction, especially when she was able to so clearly articulate Albus' demise. Yet, that the death of the man they believed to be her least favourite professor caused her to be moved to tears was baffling.

With difficulty, she collected herself, wiping her tears away and taking a deep breath.

"I'm sorry for being so emotional. I realize you must be confused," she said shakily. "I'm sorry, um, just give me a moment please." She walked to the window and placed her hands against the cool glass. Drawing another shaky breath, she closed her eyes, trying desperately to get herself under control. She had been strong for so long, never giving in to the pain, but now it was all coming down on her. All the pain and loss of the war was crumbling upon her with such force she felt she could hardly stand. Drawing what little strength she had left from her core, she turned and once again faced her three former professors.

"I think it would be best for everyone if you could send me home now. I cannot afford to be missing from my time."

"I'm afraid it may not be so simple, Hermione," Albus said seriously.

"Well, I need to get home as soon as possible. I have responsibilities!"

"I understand, my dear, but these things do take time. I think the earliest that it would be possible would be in a few months. We have no way of going into the future as of now," Albus said practically.

"A few months? I can't be here for a few months! I have a little boy at home who needs me, so we damn well better find a way to get me home sooner than that!" Hermione exclaimed emphatically.

"Hmph, I'm sure whatever idiot you married could look after a child for a few months," Severus sneered unsympathetically.

Blinking back tears, Hermione said harshly, "My son's father is *dead*, so no, there is not someone to care for my child in my absence."

"Oh, my dear child, I am so sorry!" Minerva exclaimed.

"Another victim of the war," she said bitterly.

"That is very sad news indeed. Is there no one else who could look after your son?" Albus asked.

"I suppose Harry and Ginny could watch him or Draco and Daphne...." Hermione said thoughtfully.

"Draco and Daphne?" Severus asked sharply.

"Yes, Draco is Dante's godfather," Hermione replied calmly.

"Draco, as in Draco Malfoy?" Minerva clarified incredulously.

"Yes, he came to his senses eventually, though that is probably more than I should tell you," Hermione answered.

"Wonderful!" Albus exclaimed. "Simply wonderful!"

"You speak as though the war is over in your time," Severus observed, in a seemingly uninterested way.

"Yes... it has been over for a few years now," Hermione said, somewhat sadly.

"That's good news, though, isn't it?" Albus asked gently. "You don't seem very triumphant."

"I lost a lot in that war. The years following the destruction of the Dark Lord have been difficult for me. I'm afraid the end of the war did not bring me much joy," she said quietly.

"Surely, the victory must have made it easier for you to raise your child," Minerva said.

"Perhaps... I suppose I am not afraid to let him go outside without me anymore, but it isn't easy raising a child alone," Hermione admitted.

"No, I imagine it must be very difficult. I hope I have been of some help to you, my dear," Minerva said hopefully.

Smiling softly, Hermione agreed, "Yes, you have been a great help to me with Dante. You may not be biologically related to him, but he has been raised to think of you as his grandmother."

"Oh!" Minerva exclaimed happily, clasping her hands over her heart.

"You are an excellent grandmother to Dante. If anything, I think you spoil him, but you never let me complain about that too much."

"Well, it is a grandmother's prerogative to spoil her grandchild."

"You always use that excuse," Hermione laughed.

"I'm inclined to agree with Minerva, Hermione," Albus interjected.

Severus rolled his eyes. This entire exchange was becoming tedious. This woman who claimed to be Hermione Granger was a mystery to him. He could tell she adored her child from the way she spoke about him. *I wonder which fool she decided to procreate with,* he thought sardonically.

"Well then, tell us, Miss Granger, who is the dunderhead who bound himself to you and promptly got himself killed?" Severus sneered mockingly.

"Severus! Don't be so insensitive!" Minerva chided softly, though even she could not deny that she was curious as to whom her favourite student had married.

They stared at her expectantly, and Hermione scanned each of their faces silently. She turned her head slightly so that she was looking straight at Severus. Her eyes clouded over as they flitted over his face, before they focussed once more, boring into his with unfathomable intensity. Her gaze did not waver in the slightest as very steadily, in a controlled tone, she uttered a single word.

"*You.*"

Thanks for reading! Leave a review, please. :)