

Leap Year

by Eridanus

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Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: This is my first attempt at writing fan fiction. A big thank you goes out to my Beta, Amy Louise, who has been a great help and wonderful support. Thank you.

This story is dedicated to my friend Marc, who is as close to a muse as I'll ever get.

Disclaimer: I don't own anything. Really. J.K. Rowling owns Harry Potter and my heart. I love you J.K.! Call me!

Leap Year

She liked spending time with him because his foot didn't jump up and down when he read.

At least, that's how it had started.

Hermione Granger liked her job. Working at Hogwarts ensured that she was surrounded by somewhat intelligent individuals, and though she still worried about house-elves, it was nice not to have to cook and clean. But one thing bothered her beyond reason.

It was impossible to find peace.

In the staff room, tucked in a corner, was a small sofa, worn and as mismatched as the other furniture in the room. But infinitely comfortable and absolutely perfect. Hermione could literally spend hours on the sofa, reading. But unfortunately, she wasn't the only one who'd discovered the exquisite piece of furniture. She was more often than not joined by various other members of the staff.

And none of them understood her need for *peace*.

McGonagall ate biscuits, the crumbs spraying everywhere; Hooch only read lewd romance novels that made her snigger incessantly; Sinistra was prone to falling asleep while reading; but Flitwick was the most unforgivable of them all: his foot twitched. It would start with tiny little tremors that soon turned into jerks before he just gave up all pretence and let his foot jump up and down with such force that the whole sofa shook.

Hermione had tried everything to find peace. Silencing spells wouldn't work in such close proximity, and repelling charms just seemed too rude. She'd even tried transfiguring her own sofa to resemble the one in the staff room, but it was just impossible. Instead of being comfortable, it was lumpy, and instead of being worn, it looked too new. She couldn't get the upholstery right either. After a while she just gave up.

But then came Severus Snape.

Severus Snape was the perfect sofa companion. Not only did he take up the seat beside Hermione, but he was also a walking repelling charm. Whenever he sat next to her, her colleagues rarely approached her.

And the best thing about him was that he was silent. The only time any movement or sound came from his side of the sofa was when he turned a page in his book.

And soon, a friendship grew between the two professors.

Over the years, they moved off the sofa and began meeting in each other's quarters, sitting next to each other in the Great Hall, walking to Hogsmeade together, researching in the library, patrolling the halls and so on. They continued reading together on the sofa in the staff room on most nights, but as their friendship grew so did the time they spent together until you rarely saw one without the other.

As Hermione and Severus had begun getting closer, rumours had circulated around the castle about the nature of their relationship, but except for Severus occasionally pulling out the chair for Hermione in the Great Hall, nothing had indicated anything other than friendship, and the gossip had soon died down. If a Hufflepuff from time to time asked himself if anything more were going on between the two professors, the thought was soon dispelled. And after ten years of waiting, the staff had given up and accepted the reality: the Potions master and the Arithmancy professor were both asexual bookworms who hogged the good sofa.

But on the 29th of February, so many years after the first time they'd sat together on the sofa, Hermione decided that things would change.

It was unusual to do anything other than quietly read when they sat on the sofa in the staff room. Research was for the library, experimentation for the laboratory, and discussions for their own quarters, but tonight Hermione sat on her favourite sofa and fidgeted. Severus was reading beside her, and she could practically *feel* his patience crumbling. The third time she pulled her book bag to her knees, only to set it down on the floor again, he snapped his book shut.

"Woman, cease squirming, or I'll Petrify you," he growled. Hermione cleared her throat and pulled her book bag to her lap, this time allowing it to remain there.

"I have something to discuss with you, Severus," she said, standing up so she could pace back and forth in front of him.

"Can't this wait? You are clearly agitated. We can discuss this tomorrow," he said with finality.

"No. No, I... Did you know that it's Leap Year this year? And that it is in fact Leap Day today, February 29th?" He nodded. "Are you familiar with any Leap Year traditions?"

His brow furrowed. "I can't say I am. Of course, some obscure potions will only work if brewed on Leap Day, but that's not really tradition. Why? Hermione, you are behaving very oddly."

Hermione stopped abruptly and stared at him, nervously biting her bottom lip. "In some countries, it is an old tradition that on Leap Day..." She coughed and fixed her stare on her shoes. She hadn't felt this nervous since her first day at Hogwarts, standing in line for the Sorting. "That on Leap Day women may propose." The last part came out as a whisper.

Severus' mouth opened, but no words came out. Hermione fell to her knees in front of him.

"Marry me, Severus. I love you," she said, willing him to understand the sincerity in her words. "I have loved you since the first time you showed me your collection of first edition books. I don't have a lot of money or a ring, but I have a lot of books and my heart, and I'll give you both if you say you'll marry me."

Seconds ticked by before Hermione dared to look up at Severus. He was staring at her, his eyes unreadable, his mouth hanging open. His normally pale skin had gone even whiter, making him look like a sickly vampire.

After a minute of deafening silence, Hermione stood up and started rifling through her book bag. Her hand closed around a scroll of parchments. She handed it to him, her shaking hand belying her calm demeanour.

"I gathered some notes about Leap Year and the tradition, in case you were interested. I... You don't have to give me your answer now. I can... I'll come back in an hour. You can, you know, give me your answer then." She shifted a bit from foot to foot before turning and practically storming out of the staff room, leaving a gaping Severus Snape behind her.

Precisely fifty-eight minutes later, Hermione was doing her best to wear a hole in the carpet outside the staff room door. She'd changed her robes three times, only to return to the ones she'd worn before. She'd brushed her hair so vigorously it crackled with electricity, and she'd been forced to put it back in a bun. In the end, the only change in her appearance was her sweaty palms, which she was wiping on her robes every half minute.

At last, she steeled herself and grabbed the door handle. Severus was still sitting on the sofa in the corner in the same spot where she'd left him. As she closed the door behind her, he stood and walked towards her. She took a few steps, staring at Severus, who was crossing the room, his robe billowing behind him. He came to stand before her. A smudge of unexplainable soot beside his nose drew her gaze, and she lifted her hand to wipe it off.

As her finger came into contact with his skin, he closed his eyes and let his own hand travel up her arm to meet her hand. His fingers closed around her wrist, and his eyes opened. They stared at each other, and for a second it seemed to Hermione that his face was getting bigger, until he pressed his lips to hers. Gently, he nipped at her lower lip, and his hand tightened around hers. For a moment it was the greatest feeling in the world.

Until she remembered.

According to tradition, if a woman proposed to a man, and he turned her down, he would have to pay a fine to soften the rejection. It could be several things; a dress, a pair of gloves...

Or a *kiss*.

She broke away from him and tried to step back, but found herself unable to, as Severus still had a firm grip on her wrist.

"You're rejecting me." It wasn't a question. She tried to pull her hand from his grasp but failed. She took a deep breath and looked up into his tunnel-like eyes.

His brow was furrowed. "What?"

"You paid your fine with a kiss. You're rejecting me." Hermione fought to keep the tears away. She hadn't cried for years, but when she blinked, a tear slipped down her cheek. Severus' look of confusion became even more profound.

"Fine? Hermione, what on earth are you talking about? Why would I reject you?"

Hermione sniffled and wiped her nose on her sleeve. "The tradition... it was all in the parchments I gave you. Didn't you read them?"

"No, you silly woman!" He handed her a handkerchief. "You told me you love me! You asked me to marry you! What else do I need to know?"

"Well, I..." She twisted the handkerchief, frowning. "But what have you been doing this past hour, if not reading?" He smirked at her, and her heart leaped with hope.

"I Flooed my grandmother." At her arched brow, he chuckled, a foreign sound coming from his throat. "Don't even try to imitate me, my dear, you might accidentally pull something." He drew a small object from his pocket and placed it in her hand. She looked from the item to him, puzzled. "It's a hairpin. My great-grandfather gave it to my great-grandmother upon their engagement. And now, I'm giving it to you."

"Is that... Does that mean...?" Hermione stuttered as he came closer. She could feel his breath on her forehead, and her pulse sped up.

"Yes," Severus said slowly, taking the hairpin and gently sticking it in her hair. He ran his finger along her jaw line before it made its way to her lower lip, which was stuck between her teeth. He tugged it loose with the tip of his index finger and kissed her again, in the corner of her mouth. "Hermione Granger, I have loved you since you gave me that horribly knitted sweater for Christmas. I am not a house-elf to be set free, you know that, right?" She nodded, grinning. "As long as we're clear on that, yes. Yes, I will marry you."

"About time," Minerva McGonagall whispered from an armchair in a dark corner. She popped another biscuit in her mouth. "Thank Merlin for Leap Year."

A/N: Fun Fact: In Denmark, where I'm from, the fine for rejection is 12 pairs of gloves! If you want to learn more about Leap Year, Wikipedia is a never-ending source of knowledge.

Thank you for reading.