

Scorched

by karelia

Variety Challenge first runner-up. Some were banned from the wizarding world. One left of her own accord.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: Not mine

Broken. Hermione looked at the coffee machine with disgust.*Broken. Like me.*

Revulsion trickled down her spine as she took her wand out of the box stored on top of the shabby, dusty sideboard. A spell later and the coffee was dripping through the filter into the pot.

She stored the wand away in the box, the nasty feeling leaving a slight aftertaste. "Coffee..." she sighed and drew a long sip, relishing the pain the hot liquid left on her tongue. *Perhaps a walk...*

Gulping down the last of the coffee, she stood, grabbed her coat and left the bedsit, locking the door securely shut.

"Broken," Severus murmured, looking at the coffee machine with disgust.*Broken. Like us. Lucius will be unbearable without coffee, and Draco will suffer.*

He habitually grabbed for his wand and remembered, for the millionth time, it wasn't there. He checked his wallet. With some luck, there might be cheap coffee machines at the local Argos. Little over twenty pounds left. No pub visit then, but it was better than putting up with a coffeeless Lucius.

He grabbed his cloak on the way out, locked the door, and headed out. With some luck, Lucius would never know about his absence.

She walked in fast, purposeful strides. Past the grocery store that hadn't even opened yet, past Argos with its heavy metal cladding that was slowly being lifted, past the square with the trees and brown grass...the recent lack of rain was showing there. She ignored other passers-by on their way to work or wherever else they were headed. Downward, always downward. Down Kilburn High Road, past the Safeway where Muggle pensioners were already queuing...she'd forgotten it was Friday, pensioners' payday...past the tandoori that was being cleaned by a bunch of girls to ready it for the onslaught of local workers at lunchtime. Down Maida Vale with its majestic houses and still too much traffic, and finally, down Edgware Road with even more traffic and its Arab restaurants and Arab video shops and Middle-Eastern grocery shops, to Marble Arch.

She walked down the stairs, through the subway, and up the stairs to Hyde Park and took in the considerably cleaner air of the park.*Soon I won't be able to walk this far.* She relished the feel of greenery for a while, then returned to Marble Arch and took a bus back to Kilburn, inwardly sneering at her own methods of obtaining public

transport passes. She knew it wouldn't hurt London Transport, but cheating that way felt wrong nevertheless.

He was lucky. Argos had a coffeemaker of the cheap kind on special offer, only a tenner. Maybe he would make it to the pub after all. There was no queue yet, only a couple of minutes' wait for his purchase to arrive from the warehouse; then he walked back to the hole they called home, half-way distracted by the bus stopping to vomit a bunch of people, most of whom rushed into all directions, late for work. One lone woman walked ahead of him, her hair wild, her figure slim; he couldn't make out her age from the back.

She stopped about five doors down from his own hole and disappeared inside.

He continued on and uttered a sigh of relief that Lucius hadn't awoken yet. The new coffeemaker produced acceptable coffee.

Saturday. Hermione awoke with a start. Her favourite day. She'd leave in the afternoon, and by the time the sun set, she'd be in Golders Green, just in time for hot, fresh out-of-the-oven bagels.

She ignored the ever-lasting exhaustion and went about cleaning and tidying until she collapsed on the bed and slept for a few hours.

When she awoke again, it was mid-afternoon. She took a shower, dressed in transfigured robes to match Muggle styles, and left, locking the door on her way out. *Bagels.*

Saturday. *Finally.* He'd get away from the Malfoy boys...Lucius really could not be considered a man in the Muggle world...and walk up to Golders Green, maybe buy a bagel or two for dinner. He'd enjoy it on his way back. Maybe a piece of cheesecake, too. He'd have to check his wallet if cheesecake was a possibility. Damn Ministry, providing an allowance too little to live on, too much to die on.

He dutifully made lunch for the Malfoys...they'd be unbearable if he didn't...and then left for his regular Saturday afternoon walk. Alone.

The woman from the bus was way ahead of him, he noticed as he turned into Claremont Road. *Another nutter who likes walking?* This wasn't the bus route.

He walked as steady a pace as she did and didn't reduce the distance.

Until she...had she sat down? Collapsed?

He hurried his steps.

With a start, he recognised her. "Granger."

The walk felt longer, heavier, today. It wasn't the weather. No rain, even the humidity was barely there. Just sunshine with a beautiful blue sky on an early autumn afternoon. She'd only reached Claremont Road...still an hour at least to go, and all uphill. Strange. It hadn't bothered her the week before.

She needed to sit down. Damn. There were no low walls to sit on. *Merlin, help me...*

Next, she heard a faint voice calling her. "Granger." It was a familiar voice, yet strangely far away. Then, everything went black.

Fuck. She'd passed out completely. He had no idea what to do. When a car passed, he bent his head over hers in sheer instinct, hoping for the best...and breathed a sigh of relief when the car didn't stop. *Thank Merlin for the ignorance of Londoners...*

"Granger, can you hear me?"

No response.

He tried again, stroking her cheek roughly. "Granger, come on, this is not the place to faint!"

Finally, she stirred. "Oh, god," she groaned, then opened her eyes. They widened as she recognised him. "P-Professor Snape!"

"Yes. Though *Professor* is overrated," he said, relieved she'd regained consciousness. "Can you walk? I'd carry you, but that might draw attention, which would be a bad idea."

She tried to rise, and finally, with his help, she stood on her own feet. Rather shakily, but she stood. "I'll try..." she said, taking a few uncertain steps.

The walk back took forever. She swayed the moment he took his hand off her arm and needed to stop every few yards to regain her strength. Eventually, he had enough and picked her up unceremoniously, walking in fast strides to the house he'd seen her enter the previous day. "This is your home?" He carefully set her down, ready to grab her arm in case her legs buckled.

"Yes." She searched through her pockets for the key and unlocked the door. He figured she was very poorly...she didn't even ask how he knew.

He led her to the sofa and then headed into the kitchenette for some water. "Here. Drink." He looked at her, searching for any indication of illness. He found none. She was pale, but looked neither undernourished nor injured. If it weren't for her haggard face, he'd consider her chubbier than during her school days.

"You should go to St Mungo's to have them check you out," he suggested.

A bitter laugh, so dejected a shiver of fear ran down his spine, answered him. "I might as well sign my own death warrant."

"What do you mean?" Had she gone mental? "Any Muggle treatment would interfere with your magic, you know that."

"Yes. Which is why I'm not seeing any Muggle doctor. At least not until it's inevitable."

He did not remember having seen her this disconsolate, not even when he'd insulted her about her teeth way back when she was a student. "What on earth is wrong with you, Granger? What happened to the opinionated, high-spirited witch?"

She shook her head and looked away. Suddenly, she doubled over. "Fuck."

He was at her side in a split second. "What is wrong? If you don't want to go St Mungo's, let Poppy see you at least." He swore when he realised she'd fainted again. "Damn, Granger, this isn't good." He looked around for any sign of her wand. His own was stored safely in the Ministry until some jury might deem him worthy of using it again. Merlin knew when that would be. Her wand would do to summon Poppy. If he could find it.

"Granger. Where is your wand?" he tried once, then again after a few seconds.

Eventually, she weakly pointed to the sideboard by the window. "Box," she whispered.

He jumped up, rushed to the sideboard and opened the box. There lay her wand. "Silly girl," he muttered. *Why is she hiding her wand, even going out without it?* It was unfathomable that a witch would ever wish to be without her wand.

Taking it out of the box, he tried to levitate a book. It worked. He cast a Patronus and sent it to Poppy, then placed the wand back in the box before clutching it again. *Might need it...* He suppressed the voice of guilt informing him he only took it because he missed the feel of a wand in his hand.

Severus walked back over to her side and cast a few diagnostic charms while waiting for Poppy.

She appeared healthy, though her magic was suppressed. Not surprising if she was hiding her wand all the time.

Minutes ticked by, and she was still unconscious. *Poppy, where are you?* he wondered.

The matron popped into existence, slightly out of breath. "Severus, so good to see you. I'm sorry for the delay. I had to tend to a couple of injuries from the Quidditch match. What's happening?" She frowned as she took in the scene and pointed her wand at the girl, shooting off one spell after another until finally, she took a deep breath. "I was wondering what'd happened to her. She disappeared barely a month ago with no trace. Potter is still looking for her. But, yes... not surprising..." She frowned again.

"What do you mean, *not surprising*, Poppy?"

"Oh, I forgot. Of course you wouldn't know. A few months ago, there were rumours flying around about a spectacular break-up between Miss Granger and Mr Weasley. Apparently, she accused him of getting her drunk on Muggle cocktails just to *get into her robes*. He ended up in St Mungo's to recover from her hexes. Then, a few weeks ago, she disappeared." Her eyes met his. "Severus... I cannot take her to Hogwarts. Potter turns up every other day, and she obviously does not wish to be found by anyone."

"Would you care to tell me what's wrong with her?"

Poppy averted her eyes. "She is miscarrying." The mediwitch exhaled slowly. "I don't know the details of her history, so I can only make an educated guess. I suspect she was very heavily opposed to being pregnant, and this is the result."

Severus nodded slowly. "That explains why she refused to go to St Mungo's. I suggested it to her after she regained consciousness, and she was adamant it would be equal to signing her own death warrant."

"If the rumours are true... Mr Weasley would never allow her to give up the child to another family. He'd insist on bringing it up himself, knowing he'd have the back-up of his family, and I'd imagine that to be the last thing she'd want."

Severus sighed inwardly. He didn't need complications in his life. It was bad enough being forced to share the rat hole that was his current home with the Malfoy males. The only way to maintain peace was to do the cooking every day and deal with utility companies and other Muggle calamities himself, for the Malfoys had no idea how to cope with either nor any interest in learning anything Muggle-related. He looked at the witch on the sofa. *Damn conscience...* Then his eyes met Poppy's.

"She'll be all right in a few days. But the only way no-one will find her is for her to stay here, with someone to take care of her. I can..." she frowned in concentration, "...damn, I can provide most potions but not the iron reconstitute..."

"I can make it as long as I have use of a wand," he answered. "And I'll just assume she won't mind me using hers in order to get her back to health."

"Oh, Severus, thank you! I'd hate for her to have to face Weasley in her state!" Poppy put a hand on his arm, and for once, the physical contact didn't bother him. "How are you faring out here in the Muggle world?" She cast a concerned look at him.

He grunted. "I'm surviving, aren't I...?"

She sighed. "It can't be easy with the Malfoys."

"No, it isn't. But I'll be damned if I don't survive the two years...twenty months now...until I get my wand back."

She looked at him again. "I doubt it'll be that long, Severus. There are several Order members who are working on having you vindicated."

"I can't leave unless they vindicate Lucius and Draco at the same time. I know they wouldn't survive out here for any length of time." His laugh was bitter. "Hell, they can't fucking fry an egg, Poppy. They'd starve, what with the pitiful allowance."

Poppy nodded. "Look. You have Miss Granger's wand for now. If you need anything, let me know. Send a Patronus. I'll be back tomorrow evening to check on her." She took a couple of vials out of her robes. "Give her these. One dose every six hours or so. She'll wake up by tomorrow afternoon, I expect."

He nodded and took the vials from her. "I need to check on Lucius and Draco and let them know I won't be there. Can you stay for another ten minutes?"

"Go. I'll wait," Poppy said. She smiled at him, a reassuring smile that made him painfully aware how much he was missing the wizarding world.

The girl came around shortly after he'd administered the third dose of the potions Poppy had left and stared at him.

"What happened?" she whispered.

"You miscarried. Poppy came by last night after you'd fainted."

"Good." Her tone was cold, but not without emotion.

"I understand," he offered.

"I doubt you do, but thanks. I think." Now she sounded almost wry. "Thank you for looking after me."

"I understand that you're relieved the pregnancy ended... Hermione." He'd said it carefully. "My mother once went through a... similar situation."

"Oh." Then, "I hate him. I hate him as much as I once loved him."

He was glad he wasn't in Weasley's shoes. "Hate is a strong word."

"He tried to ruin my life. Should I go and thank him?" She locked eyes with him, and he couldn't help noticing the spark in them. *At least she's beginning to live again...* He understood passion, even if it was spent on negative thoughts. She'd heal. Eventually.

"No, of course not. And I don't mean to dismiss the trauma you went through, finding yourself pregnant against your will, against your plans, and probably against your hopes as well. But I've learned that karma tends to bite back, and he will get his comeuppance. For now, be angry. You have every right to be."

"Thank you."

He caught himself wanting to stay. But he had to check on Lucius and Draco. He hated the fact that they depended on him so willingly, so unconditionally. He hated that there were still twenty months to go before he'd get his wand back, before he'd be his own person again. A thought struck him.

"Why have you not been using your wand?"

She averted her eyes. "I hated the wizarding world. First, I hated the fact that I allowed him to get me drunk. Then I hated myself for failing a contraception spell, even though I know it's his fault. I lived in denial about this pregnancy for more than four months, and I hated myself for it. I blamed it all on magic. So I locked my wand away and only used it for emergencies." She sounded pathetic.

She looked small and helpless, and he wanted to take her into his arms and reassure her that he wouldn't let anything bad happen to her. Instead, he said, "I have to leave. Lucius and Draco are completely lost in the Muggle world and rely on me to feed them."

She gazed at him for a while. "Take my wand. It'll speed up the feeding, no?" Then, a hesitant grin.

He returned it with a smirk. "It would. Am I correct guessing you don't mind my company?"

She averted her eyes now. "I don't want to be alone."

His black heart reached out to her, and he was lost for words momentarily. "I'd say come along, but Poppy would kill me if I made you walk as far as the kitchen. I can promise, though, that I shan't be long. Especially with a wand, I'll be done quickly."

He returned, with the wand, within an hour. Not that she was worried. But it felt good that he'd stuck by his word.

Long silences slowly changed to long conversations.

By Monday, she was antsy enough to get up.

By Wednesday, she was ready to accompany him to his own hole. *Rat hole*, he called it. She did not dispute the name when she saw it.

"Granger," Draco said. "I hope you don't expect repayment of that third of a life debt."

"From you? Never," she replied coldly, then smiled almost affectionately.

"A Mud-Muggle-born?" Lucius asked, raising his eyebrow.

"Shut the fuck up, you idiot," Severus replied. "Ignore these dunderheads and know you're worth a million of them," he said, turning to Hermione.

She grinned. "It's okay. I'll cope. Really."

Saturday, they walked to Golders Green together, bought a dozen bagels between them and half a pound of cheesecake, which they shared on the way back.

"I feel free," she said when they reached her home.

"You are free," he replied.

"I don't want to be alone," she whispered.

"You don't have to be." He lifted the covers of her own bed in an inviting gesture and then lay down beside her, putting his right arm around her midst. "Don't ever feel obliged."

She'd been having dinner at the Malfoy and Snape rat hole for the past few weeks, enjoying it. She also enjoyed Severus's proximity.

He still used her wand, and she still didn't use it except for emergencies.

"Severus."

"Yes?"

"I need to contact Harry. It's driving me nuts that you're still banned from the wizarding world when you so clearly belong there."

"Don't be daft." He didn't say *I belong to you*, though he felt like saying it. It didn't matter where he was as long as she was there.

She rolled her eyes at him. "I'm not being daft. I'm being realistic!" She held her hand out, and he obliged, placing her wand in it.

She cast the Patronus spell and nearly fainted. "Severus?"

"Your Patronus has changed," he said reasonably.

"Severus!"

He chuckled. "It's a bat."

She broke down. "I... I... I don't want to love you," she sobbed.

"Hermione, what did you say?"

"I... I..." her teary eyes met his, "I don't want to love you." She looked away.

He embraced her. "It's okay. I won't hold it against you." It was the best he could do. Gods, he loved her.

"But if it helps, I don't want to love you either, and yet..." Words escaped him. He held her tighter.

She turned to face him, tear-stricken, and grinning sheepishly.

"You bastard. Did you have it all planned?"

"No. Not at all. The first time I saw you I didn't even recognise you."

She went all teary-eyed again, and he shushed her. "Go to sleep, Hermione. I'll still be around in the morning, you know."

She went to sleep quietly, and he held her, content with himself.

A stag Patronus called in the morning. "Gods, Hermione, I thought I'd never hear from you again! Things are going well. Snape and the Malfoys should be vindicated within the next few days! How are you? I need to know. I promise I won't tell Ron!"

She smiled and turned to snuggle with Severus. "Make me feel good, and please, don't make me pregnant."

He chuckled. "Miss Granger, have you learned the basic contraception spells?"

"Yes," she cried. "I did! And it did fuck all!"

He held her tighter. "Watch me cast it, Hermione, all right?"

He cast the spell as she watched with wide eyes. "You all right?"

"Yes..." She hugged him hesitantly.

Then, finally, her passion unleashed. She explored him, every inch of him, with her hands, her fingers, her lips. Until he stopped her. "My turn."

She looked and felt divine in every way. A goddess. Her skin soft and faultless, her body spelling utter perfection, waiting to be pleased. And pleasure he did.

Her cry of completion was a reward he'd never dreamed of receiving, and he swore to himself that moment that he'd never let her go of his own accord.

She started at the sound of the bell, followed closely by a loud knock. "Nobody knows me here..." She looked at him with eyes speaking of panic.

"I'll go see who it is. Might be Lucius or Draco, nervous over not getting a cooked breakfast."

He grabbed his pyjama pants on his way out.

"Severus."

She recognised that deep voice.

"May I come in? I have good news, if that's what you're wondering."

Hermione pulled on her pyjamas and made her way to the living room where no doubt Severus had led Kingsley.

"Kingsley."

He smiled at her. "Hermione. I'm so glad to see you're in good hands."

Good hands indeed. She snickered to herself. "Yes, I am, thank you."

"Severus..." he made eye contact with the wandless wizard, "...the Wizengamot has taken up your case, upon the Order's pressure, and I'm here to tell you that you're free to return to the wizarding world. I have with me your and the Malfoys' wands." He handed Severus his own wand first and then the other two.

Severus locked eyes with the recently elected Minister. "Kingsley, I thank you. Do me a favour." He handed two wands back at him. "Give those to the Malfoys five doors up from here. I will rejoin the wizarding world when Hermione is ready."

She rose. "I'm ready, Severus," she whispered. "With you on my side, I'll be ready to face anything." She held her hand out, and he took it and pulled her closer.

Fin

A/N: Many thanks to Annie Talbot for betaing.

Prompt 11. Exile Challenge

a. Severus/Lucius/ Draco are sentenced to serve time in the Muggle world without magic for their roles as Death Eaters. They are stripped of their wands and they must live as a Muggle for at least a year. What happens?