

Time and Consequences

by Pearle

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Originally written and posted to 'between2snakes' as a thank you to Ladyinthecloak for all she does.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Summary: Opportunity comes in many forms, if you know where to look for it.

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Disclaimer: The characters, settings, etc. of the Harry Potter series are not mine; they belong to J.K. Rowling and Co.; I promise to return them when I am through. Well, most of them anyway.

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Time and Consequences

It had been twelve years since the downfall of the Dark Lord. Twelve years of peace. Years spent in relative contentment as far as Severus Snape was concerned, even if the first two had been filled with endless rounds of treatments at St Mungo's. Difficult-years to be sure, spent recovering from Nagini's bite and the damage her venom had caused; treatments of magical therapy to improve the damaged muscles of his neck and shoulder, treatments for damaged nerves, multiple rounds of foul smelling potions used to fight the neurotoxins injected into his blood. Years spent wondering if death would not have been preferable as yet another practitioner prodded, poked, and spelled his body.

He'd suffered tens of hundreds of hours spent dealing with the medical staff until Severus thought he would go mad, only his weakened condition stopping him from hexing those attending to him so he could finally die in peace, or die in Azkaban, which was all he really deserved until that whelp Potter had gone and championed his cause. Even now, the thought that Potter had managed to snow the Wizengamot into pardoning him of all crimes committed in his role as 'a spy for the light,' annoyed him to no end. But the idiot boy hadn't stopped there, he'd even managed to get them to award him an order of Merlin for his role in Voldemort's defeat, the pension associated with the award a welcome stipend to his meager funds, if truth be told, something he would never have admit to anyone, least of all Potter.

He'd counted himself lucky that he had survived relatively intact (some lingering pain in his neck and a bit of numbness in his shoulder, but thankfully, full use of his hands), but the real pleasure in his life came from his lack of interaction with the 'Golden Trio.' Even Potter had left him alone after his first and only visit to St Mungo's to tell Severus of his decision to champion his case, Severus' caustic manner not deterring the young man one bit.

He hadn't had to deal with any of them. Until now, until she'd come back. And now he was forced to deal *with*er on a daily basis.

Severus sneered as he watched the young woman enter the Great Hall. He ignored her polite nod as she ascended the steps leading to the raised dais, even her quiet greeting as she passed by his seat was not acknowledged. If he were being truly honest with himself, he would have admitted that her serene calm unnerved him in a way few things did; hence the need to distance himself from this remarkable witch.

He recalled the first time he'd seen Granger when he walked into the staff meeting at the beginning of the year; her back had been to him, but he would have recognized that mane of untamed hair anywhere. Minerva had always been quick to share news of her favorite Gryffindor's progress through the years, and though Potter's life was regularly chronicled in the *Daily Prophet*, Minerva had insisted on reading the articles out loud at the High Table before adding her own personal commentary, though now that he considered it, little was mentioned about the Granger chit. Granger's broken engagement to Weasley was legendary, fodder for every paper around when two-thirds of the Golden Trio had announced their engagement immediately after the final battle only to break up just three short weeks later. He'd attributed her very 'public disappearance,' when he thought about it, if he thought about it at all, to the desire to lick her wounds in private rather than some nefarious plan enacted by person or persons of unknown origin as suggested regularly by her friends. While the idiotic duo had settled into a relatively normal life, the last third of the group remained in hiding for almost two years, nothing more than an occasional card to Minerva to mark this event or that until surfacing suddenly after two years of self imposed exile to join an exclusive training program for healers at St Mungo's.

With the increase in enrollment (this year marking the entrance of those wizards and witches conceived after the war), Minerva had seen fit to add to the staff, thus Granger joined on as Poppy's assistant, as well as several other witches and wizards that were hired to teach the influx of young minds.

Granger had always annoyed him. Not just her choice in friends, but her know-it-all attitude grated on his nerves. Severus limited his interactions with the witch to sitting as far away for her as possible at the High Table and at staff meetings. He avoided the library when he knew her to present and generally avoided her whenever possible. Thankfully, he dealt with only Poppy when restocking the potions she needed. Still, it was impossible to avoid her entirely. Even without her presence accosting him, his colleagues spoke of her often, her unusual knowledge of the eastern art of Reiki, her enhanced ability to heal, her lack of suitors and future prospects, all topics open for discussion by the old hens that gathered in the staff lounge.

It wasn't until fate stepped in, in the form of a one, Thomas Timrod, Slytherin seeker, that Severus was actually forced to deal directly with the witch. The opening game between Slytherin and Gryffindor had been going well, Slytherin ahead forty-to-ten in the first fifteen minutes of the game. Severus smiled quietly to himself as he observed the set of Minerva's mouth; he had high hopes for this year's team if the practice sessions he'd witnessed were anything to go on. While no longer the head of Gryffindor, it was no secret that Minerva still identified with 'her' Gryffindors. A sudden dive by Gryffindor's beater, Thornton, caused an in-air collision between the Slytherin beater and Slytherin's seeker resulting in Timrod falling off his broom.

Quick thinking by Hooch slowed the boy's decent and cushioned the ground as he landed. But the damage had already been done; his right arm hung at an odd angle, the bone having been broken in multiple places when his teammate had collided with him. Hermione ran to the lad, kneeling quickly at his side as she assessed his injuries.

"Shh, just lie still. Let me help you." Gently she ran her fingers across his forehead and over his eyes. The young man's rapid breathing slowed to a calm pace as she tended to him.

"It's his arm that's injured, not his head. What sort of healer are you, Granger?" Severus asked, not bothering to mask the annoyance in his voice as he reached the pair.

Hermione glared at the man, her voice still calm as she answered him. "I know *where* the injury is, Professor. But I need to have him calm and cooperative before I can help him. **Your** attitude is not helping." Calmly, she turned back to the boy. "I'm going to lay my hands on you. I'll try to cause as little pain as possible, but I want to see if I can feel any vibrations before I try and move you."

Severus watched as Hermione prepared herself both physically and mentally; her eyes slipped closed as she steadied her breathing. Running her hands a mere fraction of an inch over the afflicted area, Severus could feel an odd increase in the air pressure around him.

"He needs a dose of Skele-Gro, not fake magic from the East."

"There are many forms of magic, Professor." With a deft hand Hermione conjured a stretcher for the young man before casting a quiet *Mobilicorpus* to raise the injured youth onto the stretcher. "Let's get you back to the castle so that I can heal all of you," she said with a pointed look at Severus. "I'm afraid the remainder of the game will have to wait for another day." Without a backwards glance, Hermione set off for the castle with her charge bobbing gently beside her. Silently, Severus stalked after her.

"Here you go. Go on, you need to drink the whole cup." Hermione offered the smoking cup to the young man that lay on the cot. "Fortunately, mending bones is much easier, and much less painful, than regrowing them. You should be up and around by morning. I remember my second year here. Harry had been forced to have his arm bones regrown when he fell from his broom." A sad smile graced her lips as she thought of the past. She had been so young then, had that time really existed? The slamming of the ward door drew her back to the present.

"Well?" Severus glared irritably at the witch.

"Good afternoon to you too, Professor."

"The boy?" he asked angrily, gesturing to Timrod.

"Yes, he is."

Severus' breath came in short pants, his annoyance mounting. "How is he? How long will he be here?" he asked through clenched teeth.

"He's fine. His arm should be fully healed by tonight, though I'd rather keep him until morning to be sure. It was broken in two places with a few small splinters, but the breaks were clean and should respond to the growth potion." Hermione smiled. "Now, that wasn't so hard, was it?"

"On the contrary. Timrod." Severus nodded to the seeker before turning sharply on his heel and sweeping out the ward doors without a second look at Granger.

"Such a charming man." The quiet snicker from her patient brought forth a chuckle of her own.

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Carefully setting his wine glass on the side table, Severus sighed softly to himself before returning his attention to the book in his hand. It had been a long day, made longer and highly exasperating by his brief interaction with Granger. The young witch was just as annoying now as she had been when she was his student; just the outer packaging had changed. His stomach rumbled as he thought about Flooing the kitchen for a late night snack. He'd foregone dinner in the Great Hall, having no desire to see Granger again and was paying for that decision. Reaching for his glass he thought some fruit and cheese might go well with the wine he was drinking. The sudden knock at his door startled him, the wine in his glass spilling from his sudden start, a quick *Scourgify* cleaned up the mess. As far as he was concerned, no one, absolutely no one in his or her right minds would call on him after hours. Even the Headmistress would have used the Floo.

He was prepared to hex his unexpected visitor if the reasons for said interruption into his quiet evening didn't hinge on a life and death crisis that required his immediate interaction. Angriily, he flung the door open only to be faced with the same witch he had been avoiding all night.

"What is your problem? What do you have against me?"

Severus stared wide-eyed as Hermione pushed past him and started to pace angrily in front of his coffee table. "Oh, please *do* come in, Healer Granger," he said with a snarl.

"You see, there it is again. Exactly, what have I done to make you hate me so?" Hermione plopped into the empty oversized chair in front of the fire. The soft leather a welcome change to the uncomfortable wooden chairs in the hospital ward. She scanned the room, not quite registering the walls of books, the soft rug at her feet, or the comfortable furnishings of the room, instead her gaze landed on Severus and stayed there.

Severus stared at the young woman. She couldn't be serious? "Is Mr Timrod alright?"

"Yes, he's fine. Poppy's with him. She's on duty tonight. Why do you ask, I wouldn't think you care what happens to him?"

"Of course I care, I'm Head of his house. However, I really don't care why you're here. But enough is enough. Get out, Granger."

"No."

"No?"

"No, not until you tell me why you hate me. You glare at me every chance you get. For the last two months you have avoided me like the plague."

Severus sneered at the witch. "And this bothers you, because...?"

"Because...? Why wouldn't it bother me? What did I do? What is your problem?"

"Granger, have I changed from the Professor you first knew as a student? Was I ever nice to you, or anyone else for that matter, back then? Or...ever? Was there ever a time when you thought I *did* like you?"

Confused, Hermione shook her head. "No."

"Do you like me?" Severus moved the book he'd abandoned to the coffee table before picking up his wine glass and reclaiming his seat.

"Like you? How can I like you? I don't know you."

"Have I *ever* been nice to you?"

"No, I suppose not. There were times you seemed...indifferent to me, even tolerable, but never nice. Nice is not exactly a word I would associate with you, Professor."

"Then why do you think things should be different now? Why do you care?" Severus had no doubt that if looks could kill, he would've been a smoldering pile of ash right about now.

"Because at some point, I would have thought you'd have outgrown your childish ways. I suppose I was wrong." Exasperated, Hermione jumped to her feet. "Have you not noticed that apart from the new Herbology assistant, that you and I are the only two human beings living here at the castle that are under the age of sixty five?"

Severus eyed the witch speculatively. "And that concerns me, how? Do you have problems with your libido? Williamson is younger than I am. Won't he help you out?"

Hermione growled at the dour man. "No, I am not having a problem with my libido. I would just like to have an intelligent conversation once in a while, one that does not include regurgitation of the latest Quidditch scores or moves. Williamson," Hermione said with a quiet snort, once again sinking back into the chair she had just vacated. "His idea of an intelligent conversation is to go into great detail about the latest components of his new compost heap." Hermione's laugh turned into a cough that ended as she cleared her throat.

"And you didn't find this interesting?" Still annoyed with the witch, but guessing he wasn't going to get rid of her too easily, he summoned a second glass as he questioned her.

"Are you kidding? Did you know that the decomposition of various waste products from different magical animals varied on a sliding scale depending on their size, weight, and mass?" Absent-mindedly she accepted the glass of wine Severus held out to her.

"And this didn't interest you?"

"Well, I did find it interesting until he went into unnecessary details about the composition and color of the waste. I think it took him as long to tell me about the process as it did for the magic to actually work on the compost. It was just...too much," she said with a shrug.

"Four feet of parchment when the assignment was to turn in a foot and a half?"

"I tend to have trouble editing myself," she said with a sheepish smile. A glance at Snape's abandoned book brought a bright smile to her face. "The works of George Bernard Shaw? He's one of my favorite playwrights. I can't believe you read Muggle books?"

"Some. Dracula is one of my favorites. I identify with the main character."

The sheer deadpan tone of his deliver of the last line made Hermione burst out laughing. "I never called you a bat."

"Not even when I flew under my own power?" One brow rose questioningly as his black eyes glittered with undisguised humor.

"Which just goes to show what a powerful wizard you are. Why do you hate me?" she asked softly.

"I don't hate you, Granger."

"You don't? You could have fooled me."

Severus pinched the bridge of his nose, a headache forming behind his eyes. "I have spent too many years dealing with dunderheads. I find I don't suffer fools easily."

Hermione's eyes went wide. "And you think me a fool?"

"No, not you. But the company you keep..."

"Harry and Ron? You don't think they've grown up in the last twelve years? Harry especially."

Severus watched with interest as a small tick formed below Hermione's left eye. Evidently the thought of Weasley still had power over the witch. "You may not believe me, but you are worth ten of Weasley. He didn't deserve you."

Stunned at the unexpected compliment, Hermione's smile broadened. "And Harry?"

Severus shook his head. "Still too much like his father, as far as I can see, though he seems to have...matured in recent years."

The two sat quietly for a few minutes, each lost in their own thoughts. "This all I wanted from you."

"You're lying and you know it, Granger."

"Lying?"

"I know you. The minute I let my guard down. The minute I allow you to become a 'friend,' I'll never get rid of you. Potter and Weasley will end up haunting my hallway. I've enjoyed the quiet up 'til now. I have no desire to subject myself to those two. Besides which, I know you. You'll want to borrow my books. Do you really think me that much of a fool?" He smiled as he saw Hermione's eyes drift to the bookcase behind him, he caught the slight twitch of her finger's; her desire to reach out and caress the book bindings, the need to devour their contents.

"If I promise to start slowly? Only borrow one or two at a time?"

The quiet chime of his desk clock startled him. Could it really be midnight already? Their time together had been surprisingly...pleasant. Did she really want to be friends with the 'greasy git'? Could he reciprocate? Did he want to? "You may borrow two, and if they are not returned in the same condition they were lent out, there will be hell to pay. Be warned, Granger, I will extract my pound of flesh."

"I hope so," Hermione responded, her tone quietly caressing the comment, changing the meaning entirely.

Severus stared at the witch, her sly innuendo surprising him. Suddenly the future looked brighter. "We shall see, won't we?"

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A/N: Just a one-shot that was written a few months ago as a thank you to Ladyinthecloak for all she's done for the fandom (the site on LJ between2snakes can be found here: [http://community\(dot\)livejournal\(dot\)com/between2snakes](http://community(dot)livejournal(dot)com/between2snakes) , just change the word dot to, well a dot and drop the parentheses. There are a lot of other great stories there to choose from).

Some of the prompts for this story were: laying on of hands, wine, cheese, and George Bernard Shaw.

Still working on finishing Dances (well over my time expectations, I know, but I hope to be done this month) and now entering my third week of walking pneumonia (Doctor's apt today and hopefully no hospitalization believe it or not, I really, really get tired of all this health drama!).

Ta!

Pearle Oct. 1, 2009