

Broken

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He had found her broken, and it had brought them together...

One-shot

Chapter 1 of 1

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He had found her broken.

What had started as a regular day had quickly spiralled into a tragedy. He had been on patrol that night, checking the grounds for students who might have been up and about, loitering around late at night. It was only just past midnight when he went to secure the gates and ensure that the wards were still intact. He had been expecting nothing to be amiss as per usual but had been very mistaken in his assumption. While Severus Snape had seen a great many horrors in his life, nothing was enough to prepare him for what met his eyes at the gates that night.

The body of the Head Girl, Hermione Granger, lay just beyond the limits of the detection wards. She was covered in what had to have been her own blood and was crumpled in such an awkward position that he could only assume she had multiple bone breakages. He would barely have been able to recognize her were it not for the badge that was still pinned to her school robes.

Before another thought could go through his mind, however, he rushed forward, dropping to his knees beside her, frantically checking for a pulse. He found one, but it was faint, and she still seemed to be losing quite a bit of blood from both internal and external injuries. Pulling out his wand, he cast a spell over her to stop the bleeding and lifted her up into his arms before beating a hasty path back up to the castle.

Before arriving, he sent his Patronus to alert Poppy to the situation. He carried Hermione through the castle without an ounce of care if any wayward students or teachers were to see him just so long as she lived. As expected, Poppy was up in her office, clad in her nightgown and looking slightly bothered at having been woken at such a late hour. Her annoyance, however, turned to worry when she saw the state of the young woman in his arms, covered in bruises and blood.

'Put her on the bed in the private room, Severus,' the Mediwitch instructed sharply, bustling over to the supply cabinet in her office. 'This may take a while to fix.'

Snape nodded. 'Be quick, Poppy. Her pulse was faint when I reached her, and now it is barely there at all,' he said.

After laying her down on the bed, he began to remove her shoes, socks and robes to make it easier for Poppy to work. The older witch hurried into the room shortly after, immediately casting diagnostic charms over Hermione and pushing a bottle of healing ointment and a cloth into his hands. He knew what was required of him and got to work straight away, pulling a white sheet over Granger's body to give her some privacy before casting a spell to remove her clothing. Snape then began rubbing the ointment into her cuts and bruises.

After an hour of arduous work, both Snape and Poppy stepped back. All of the broken bones were mended and the bleeding properly stopped. The cuts and bruises were mostly gone with only a little discoloration and faint scars remaining. Snape had tried his hardest to ensure that her face, especially, was restored to the way it usually was.

'I'll get her a Blood Replenishing Potion, but after that I am afraid that the rest is up to Miss Granger,' Poppy said solemnly.

Snape nodded in understanding. 'She will wake up,' he said quietly. 'Miss Granger still has much to live for.'

With that, the Mediwitch left the room to collect the Blood Replenishing Potion and returned, gently administering it to her patient. Afterwards, she left with Snape's assurance that he would remain in the infirmary to watch over the student. He sat with rigid posture in the chair beside the bed, watching the shallow movements of the girl's chest as she breathed. It made his stomach clench painfully to see her lying there so helplessly. Casting his eyes down to the spotless infirmary floor, he sighed heavily.

Despite the war having ended and the Dark Lord's destruction, things would never be easy for Severus Snape.

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She could see the light from behind her closed eyelids, and it was bright.

At first she thought it might be that light people were supposed to see when they died. But then she carefully allowed her eyelids to flutter open and squinted from the brightness of the sun illuminating what appeared to be a room. The walls were white, and she immediately knew that it was not her own room that she occupied. She tried to move but found that her muscles ached terribly.

Turning her head to one side, she found that she was not alone in the room. There was, in fact, a dark-haired man in a chair that was pulled right up to the bed, his head resting face-down on the arms propped on a small portion of her bed beside her. He was dressed in black with his shirt sleeves rolled to his elbows, a black waistcoat and what she imagined would be black trousers to compliment them. She stared at him for a long while before her curiosity finally got the better of her, and she reached an arm out slowly to touch the long, raven hair.

Hermione's movements and touch seemed to have startled her companion out of what must have been a light sleep, for he sat up, blinking rapidly and revealing his identity to her. Severus Snape's inky black eyes stared back into hers for a moment until he blinked again and looked over to the door out of the room. He stood wordlessly from his seat and was out of the room and gone from her sight in seconds.

Panic rose in her then for some reason. Being left alone made her feel unsettled. But she needn't have worried, for Snape was back moments later with Poppy Pomfrey hot on his heels. The Mediwitch immediately began casting spells over Hermione before she finally stepped back with a look of relief.

'You are going to be fine, Miss Granger,' she announced, more for her own sake than Hermione's. 'You will likely be weak for a few days, but I expect you will make a full physical recovery.'

Hermione blinked up at the two faces staring down at her. 'How did I get here?' she croaked out.

'Professor Snape found you and brought you here very late last night,' Madam Pomfrey answered soberly.

'I was attacked from behind in the castle on my patrol last night,' Hermione murmured softly, her throat sore from her first attempt to speak. 'It wasn't any of the other students.'

'Do you know who it was?' Snape demanded.

'It was Walden McNair and another man that I didn't recognize,' she answered softly, staring at her hands that were above the white sheets covering her.

'What did they do to you, dear girl?' Poppy asked with panic evident in her voice.

And she was right to be panicked. Everyone knew what Walden McNair was famous for as a Death Eater: torture and rape. Since the war had ended during the summer and Voldemort been destroyed, Walden McNair had been one of the very few surviving Death Eaters to have not been captured. And now, suddenly, he was making his way back into the magical world, seeking his revenge.

'What you both expect, I suppose,' she answered dully, emptiness seeping into her tone and through her body. 'They beat me, taunted me and raped me.'

'Oh, my dear girl!' Poppy exclaimed, rushing to her side and enveloping her in a motherly embrace.

Hermione felt gratitude for the sympathy and returned the embrace, but she did not shed a single tear. She would not cry or let what had happened ruin her life.

'I'm okay,' she said simply, releasing the matron. 'When can I leave and get back to my classes?'

Poppy looked at Hermione as though the Mediwitch herself had been Stunned. 'You are thinking about going back to your classes already?' she stammered. 'But child, don't you think you might need some time away from the castle?'

'I don't want to waste time away from classes,' Hermione answered with a faint smile.

As soon as she said these words, Snape made his continuing presence in the room known with a soft snort. Hermione turned her head a fraction to look at him, only to find him looking at her with disbelief. She stared at his face. It looked a little pinched and weary, as though he hadn't had a lot of sleep. And he wouldn't have had. She had woken to him dozing beside her in a chair. He must have been at her bedside the whole night.

'You don't need to go to classes, silly girl,' he said curtly. 'You need to give your body some rest. You were severely injured last night, and to recklessly gallivant about the castle would be foolish and a waste of the efforts Madam Pomfrey and I gave towards healing you last night. Your internal injuries are delicate, so take the advice, and stay abed until at least Monday morning.'

'That's three whole days,' she whispered, looking chastened.

'Yes, Miss Granger, but I assure you that missing one day of classes will neither kill you nor impede your studies in any way,' Snape said with a note of finality. 'You will remain in the hospital wing until tomorrow morning, and at that time you may be removed to your chambers for the remainder of the weekend. Am I understood?'

'Yes, Professor,' she answered, staring down at her hands again.

He nodded at her and Madam Pomfrey before turning on his heel, opening the door and leaving the private room, closing the door behind him. Hermione looked up at the place that he had been and sighed. How was it that Snape made her feel like a wayward child all of the time? He still had the ability to make her feel just like a first year. Madam Pomfrey chose to make her exit then, letting Hermione know that she was having a light breakfast brought in for her in a few minutes time.

When the house-elf arrived shortly after, Hermione ate her broth without complaint.

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Snape stared out at his class.

His seventh-year students were eerily quiet that day, and he was fairly certain that it was because a certain bright, young Gryffindor was missing from the room. Snape himself certainly felt her absence keenly. Ordinarily she would be bossing around her two idiot best friends and telling Neville Longbottom how to make his potion, lest he blow up the entire room. Thankfully, that lesson he had not planned any practical work, so everyone was reading and looking morbid in their seats.

He hated that Miss Granger wasn't there. Just one week before he wouldn't have cared if she was in the room or not, but after the night before, he was of a different mind as far as she was concerned. Her reaction to her kidnapping and violation was so different to what anyone would have expected. It was as though being raped and beaten was nothing to her and she just wanted to continue on. She hadn't even shed a tear while he had been in the infirmary that morning.

He sighed and rubbed his eyes, looking over the students again.

It was so strange for there to be no inter-house rivalry carrying on, theory lesson or not. He almost wanted to provoke the Gryffindors into attacking his Slytherins for once. The remainder of the lesson ticked by slowly for him before it was finally time for the class to end and he could return to his chambers until dinner in the Great Hall that evening. Minerva intended to announce vague details about Miss Granger's capture and disappearance at the end of dinner, and he wanted to make sure that the students were aware of the danger without having every detail spread around the hall. After all, everyone was entitled to their privacy.

'Class is dismissed,' he said curtly at exactly three o'clock. 'I'll expect a twelve-inch essay on the rare ingredients listed in the chapter that you read today, and also what potions they can be used in, on Monday.'

All of the students began to pack up their things to leave the room. Snape noticed that Potter and Weasley seemed particularly eager to leave, and he could only assume that they were heading to the hospital wing to see their friend. He recalled the conversation with Miss Granger from that morning and decided to stop the two idiots before they got too far away.

'Potter and Weasley, you will remain behind to discuss something with me,' he said sternly, remaining seated at his desk.

The two boys groaned, causing Snape to smirk. They probably thought that they were in some sort of trouble, which thrilled him to no end. Snape immensely enjoyed being the teacher that everyone relied on to hand out punishment. Soon the two stood before him, and he had to refocus.

'You wanted to see us, sir?' Harry asked, glancing over to the door as though he really wanted to leave.

'I want you to take the homework for Miss Granger so that she might have something to do while she is in the hospital wing,' Snape replied, handing over a scroll of parchment, a quill and some ink to the two boys. 'I assume she will not have writing implements, so take those to her when you visit her now, and she may also have a loan of my textbook.'

They both nodded, and as soon as Snape handed over his copy of Advanced Potions, they hastily made their way out. He sighed heavily once they were out of his sight. He wasn't sure why he was being so nice to the Granger girl, but something in his chest stirred every time he thought about her. Shaking his head from his wayward thoughts about the now-mysterious Miss Granger, he stood from his desk and went straight to his dungeon chambers to rest.

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Hermione stared out the window and released the breath that she had been holding.

It was Sunday, and outside she could both see and hear all of the students who were enjoying the only day of sun that there had been since early in the summer. She was still confined to her chambers by order of Professor Snape, who had been enforcing said order through the house-elves. She had not left her chambers since she had been moved there by Hagrid on Saturday morning, and it was beginning to irritate her. She had been left walking around in circles in her sitting room for hours or trying to do some extra credit work for her subjects, but she was far too distracted.

The only thing that was on her mind was what had happened that Thursday night. She remembered vaguely that she had been patrolling the dungeons and that she was just nearing the blank stretch of wall that guarded the Slytherin common room when a hand had clapped over her mouth and two strong arms had wound around her. She hadn't bothered trying to scream because she knew that whoever it was, they would just hurt her more if she did.

Shivering, Hermione turned away from the window as she recalled her rape. They had been so brutal that she was surprised that she hadn't been bleeding from the two men abusing her loins as they had. Friday after Professor Snape had left the room, Madam Pomfrey had been very careful to check that she hadn't been impregnated or permanently damaged. She had been relieved to find out that she would still be able to produce children.

She shifted in her chair by the window and almost jumped when she felt something climb up onto her lap. Crookshanks, however, seemed undisturbed by her surprise and made himself comfortable, perched on her legs as he was.

'Hello, Crooks,' she murmured softly, stroking behind his ears just the way he liked. 'It's sunny outside, and I can't even enjoy it.'

His purr was the only reply she got, but Hermione had the feeling that she was understood anyway. 'Well, at least I have you to keep me company up here all day,' she said with a resigned sigh. 'You're a good boy.'

He purred some more at her praise, and she giggled. Being half Kneazle made Crookshanks special and more able to communicate with humans, and he happened to be a particularly smart one for a tabby. He stayed with her for a little while longer before eventually jumping down and sauntering off, most likely to find something interesting to do. After he was out of sight, Hermione was left to her thoughts once more. Her mind wouldn't let the ordeal she had been through go, and while she wanted to be strong, she felt so alone and weak.

Her eyes began to burn a little then. What had happened? She could still be the same person and continue on with her life despite everything, couldn't she? She had thought so, but as with all things, it was easier said than done. It didn't matter that they had robbed her of her virginity. The thing that hurt her the most was that they had robbed her of her pride. She was the most intelligent student of her year and a first-rate candidate to become a Duellist, yet she had been unable to stop them from torturing and raping her.

Bile rose in her throat. She was a pathetic wreck now. Defenceless, weak, damaged and scarred by what had happened. No man could ever desire a woman who would not have sex with him. And she didn't want it. She felt unclean and soiled by the darkness of a true Death Eater. She didn't even desire to be herself in that moment. She rose and went to her bathroom, staring at her face in the mirror. She was so pale and chalky. She hated the dark-circled eyes that stared back at her.

'I hate you,' she whispered at her reflection, the tears beginning to slide down her cheeks as she cried silently.

'I hate this place,' she said more forcefully, slamming her clenched fist on the bathroom bench.

'Why did I tell them that I would be alright here?' she groaned, tears pouring from her eyes as she lifted her fist and slammed it against her mirror angrily.

The sound that the mirror made as it shattered from the blow was lost on her ears. She barely even noticed the blood trickling freely from the deep cuts she now bore. All she knew as she ran to the toilet to throw up the last thing that she had eaten was that she was not going to be okay.

'Damn you,' she whispered as she wiped her mouth on the back of her hand after vomiting. 'I am damned...'

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She sat in class, staring at the board behind his desk.

Never had she been so distracted in her entire life. It had been five days since she had been allowed back to classes, and it was the last class of the day. Unfortunately, she had double Potions, and that day Snape hadn't even assigned a potion for them to make. Snape had simply written page numbers on the board and had told them to read in silence for the whole lesson. Harry and Ron beside her both had their heads down, reading a Quidditch magazine from behind their textbooks.

She sighed softly, looking over at Snape, who was sitting at his desk silently. He seemed to be writing in a thick book with a leather cover, using a standard, black quill. His brow was furrowed, and she wondered what he was thinking. He looked up then all of a sudden, and she soon found herself looking into his inky black eyes. Shaking her head a little, she averted her eyes from his, embarrassed at being caught staring.

Snape, however, continued to stare at Hermione long after she had lowered her eyes from his. He had felt her eyes on him when she had been staring at him and hadn't been able to stop himself from looking up, his curiosity getting the better of him. What had surprised him, however, had been the pure sorrow that he had seen in her eyes when he had looked there. There was something about the dark circles beneath her eyes and the way that she averted them so quickly that made him sure that something was not quite right. He noted that she seemed to be looking a little on the gaunt side and had noticed only the night before at dinner that she seemed to be pushing the food around on her plate.

Initially, he assumed it might have been because there had been no news on whether or not Walden McNair and his partner in crime had been caught or even sighted. Snape knew that Moody and Remus Lupin had been hot on the trail since the Order had been notified of the incident. Miss Granger had given him permission to let a few old members know to keep their eyes out for mysterious disappearances or any possible sightings. They were doing everything that was in their power to capture the Death Eaters and prevent anything similar from happening again.

He blinked and concentrated on the book in front of him once more. He wasn't so sure why Miss Granger's state concerned him so much, but he knew that he would have to keep an eye out for her. Someone had to know that she was suffering to some degree. Sighing, he looked to the clock on his desk and noticed that it was time for class to end for the day. He stood and walked to the board, tapping it lightly with the end of his wand and changing what was written there.

'Your assignment for the weekend is written on the board,' he said, startling the students from their reading. 'Copy it down, and then you may leave quietly.'

He watched as everyone quickly closed their books, scribbled down the homework, and began to hastily stuff their books and writing implements into their bags before making a mad dash for the door. Hermione Granger, however, did not seem to be in so much of a hurry as her peers and waved her two dunderhead friends onwards as she calmly and neatly piled her books and papers into her bag. He took a moment then to admire the care that she took with all of her belongings and schoolwork.

'Miss Granger, a word if you please?' he said, gesturing to the door that led to his private office.

She nodded. 'Very well, Professor,' she answered quietly.

She followed him into his office, and he gestured for her to sit in the chair on the opposite side of the desk from where he sat down. Once she was seated, he snapped his fingers, and a house-elf brought in a tea tray and set it on one side of the desk. Hermione noticed that it was Dobby and offered him a little smile before he bowed and disappeared with a loud crack. Snape poured out two cups of tea and pushed one towards her along with the sugar and cream.

'I suggest you drink it,' he said seriously. 'You look thin, and I noticed that you didn't seem to be eating a great deal at mealtimes.'

'I don't know what you mean, sir,' she said, following his unspoken command anyway and adding both sugar and cream to her tea.

'You can't continue to be in denial like that,' he snapped. 'You will make yourself terribly ill, and all of the time and effort that Madam Pomfrey and I gave to healing you last week will have gone to waste.'

'I assure you, Professor, that I have no intention of making myself ill,' she said defensively, not quite sure why she felt so guilty.

'I don't appreciate being lied to, Miss Granger, and I can assure you that if you do not begin to nourish your body appropriately, I will have to take drastic measures to ensure that you do so,' he told her, his expression sombre. 'If you are having issues related to the occurrences of last week, do not hesitate to speak to someone about it. It is not healthy to keep things bottled up.'

She nodded and finished her tea quickly before standing from her seat. 'I appreciate your concern, Professor, but I can assure you that there is nothing wrong,' she lied, trying to keep it as realistic as she could. 'Have a pleasant weekend, sir.'

He nodded and watched as she returned to the classroom, and he didn't bother to stand and watch her leave. He knew she had been lying through her teeth just then. It was so obvious that she was suffering, and now he had seen it in the way her eyes shone with tears when he had mentioned the week before. He breathed out a sigh and drank the rest of his tea, summoning Dobby, who took the tray away before Snape went to his chambers and removed his outer robes.

Dropping into his armchair in the sitting room, he snapped his fingers to start up the fire in front of him and closed his eyes. The image of Miss Granger immediately came to the forefront of his mind. Despite being a little on the thin side for the past week, she was still a lovely-looking young woman with a heart-shaped face, big, brown eyes that usually sparkled with excitement, lovely, pouty lips and a small, curvy figure. He cursed himself for his indecent thoughts about his student. Despite her being of age in both the Muggle and Wizarding worlds, he was a professional.

There was something so perverted and wrong about lusting after a student, and he was an old man in comparison to her. Groaning softly, he stood and went to his bathroom, pulling his clothes off and tossing them into the hamper before having a cold shower to put an end to his train of thought. Afterwards he dried off and dressed in his sleep pants. He did not want to see Miss Granger again that day, and if Minerva became upset at him for not attending dinner, well then she could stick it where it fit.

He went to bed, took a sleeping potion and passed out soon after.

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Hermione avoided Snape for the next two weeks, eating only a little more in the hall at mealtimes so that he did not hunt her down for neglecting herself, but she still could not make herself eat a whole meal. Her stomach just couldn't handle it, and most of what she ate she threw up just because her stomach was becoming too weak to handle the rich Hogwarts food. She had avoided some of the owls that her parents had been sending her and had only replied just the day before, glossing over the incident of over three weeks before and responding vaguely to all of the questions that they had asked.

The past weeks had been a struggle for her. She had found herself conflicted. She was depressed, confused, and somehow found that she was oddly attracted to her surly professor. It was the worst time for her to have come to the revelation. She hurt inside so badly, yet every time he looked at her, she felt safe in the fact that someone seemed to care what was going on with her. The main reason she had been avoiding him was that she was afraid that she was going to break down in front of him. She had said that it wasn't affecting her, and she was going to show everyone that it wasn't.

She heard a knock on the door of her chambers then. She was lucky enough, as the Head Girl, to have received the privilege of private chambers with a sitting room, bathroom and bedroom separate from the Gryffindors. There was a door to her sitting room that linked up to the common room for emergencies, mostly, but the main entrance was on the fourth floor behind a portrait of a pretty, young Morgan Le Fay. Harry and Ron, however, still didn't bother with the main entrance and just knocked on the door from Gryffindor tower instead.

'Hermione? Can we come in?' called Harry from the other side.

She looked over from where she sat in the armchair that had come as a part of the furniture in her sitting room. 'Yes, come right in - I've unlocked it,' she answered reluctantly.

The door opened, and her two best friends walked inside. Harry and Ron had both been unbelievably sweet to her since her kidnapping. But she had not dared to tell them the entire story as to what had happened, glossing over her rape totally and just mentioning the beating. Both of them in that moment were dressed in their jeans and thick jackets, ready to go out into the autumn chill.

'Are you coming with us to Hogsmeade today, Hermione?' Ron asked with a goofy grin on his freckled face.

She sighed softly. She had forgotten all about the Hogsmeade weekend that week. 'I don't think I will today,' she answered softly. 'I'm feeling a little too tired, and I have some homework to get done.'

'Are you sure?' Ron pressed.

Harry noticed the tiredness around her eyes then and took Ron by the arm, giving him a tug back in the direction of the door. 'No, it's okay. You look like you could use a rest, Hermione,' he said with a smile. 'Don't study too much today, okay?'

She smiled back. 'I'll try to keep it to the minimum,' she said, nodding. 'Have a good day out, boys.'

'We will,' Ron said, pulling Harry behind him as they left.

Hermione stood and closed the door that they had left haphazardly open before returning to her armchair. She moved it over to the big window, opening the curtains and looking out onto the grounds. The sky was grey that day, and she could see that the cold was keeping most of the students either indoors or in the carriages that took them to Hogsmeade on the cold and rainy days. She watched, then, as Snape himself climbed into the last carriage alone.

Before he closed the door, he looked up to where she sat, and their eyes made contact for a brief moment. Hermione closed the curtain suddenly. He was everywhere. Groaning, she pressed her forehead against the cold wood panel of the wall beside her, willing her mind to stay focused. She needed to stop feeling sorry for herself.

Standing from the armchair, she went to her study desk and collected her books and writing implements before settling back in her armchair to do some of her homework for the week. She was behind for the first time since she had started at Hogwarts. She had found herself sleeping instead of studying more often than not in the last few weeks because she had been so tired. Picking up her quill, she began taking notes as the fire across the room crackled and sent an orange glow over the room.

The warmth of the room and the peacefulness soon had her falling asleep in her chair.

Meanwhile, Snape wandered about Hogsmeade, his mind filled with the image of Miss Granger coupled with intense confusion. The girl had certainly been keeping him on his toes for the past few weeks. He barely saw her, and the few times that he did, she avoided him so plainly that he knew it had to be because of the talk he'd had with her about her health. She was so obviously not taking care of herself anymore, and it was plain to him that she was depressed.

He had tried to speak to Minerva about it, but all that she had said was that Miss Granger was an adult and was therefore obliged to take her health needs into her own hands. The only thing that the professors could do was encourage her to eat and to go to see Poppy Pomfrey for a check-up. But Miss Granger had not gone to see the matron about her health at all.

Earlier that morning he had seen her at the window of her room, looking down onto the grounds with such a solemn expression. His chest had clenched at the paleness of her face, and then when their eyes had met, he had felt a swooping sensation in his stomach. She had closed the curtains in the rooms after only a few seconds, and he had felt such a sensation of loss and confusion. Why did he care so much about Hermione Granger? Why did she have to be his student? And why did he want to go to her and take away all of her pain? She had always been a pain in his arse, and he missed it now that she was silent.

Sighing, he continued to plod around the village. It was nearing the time of day for him to herd all of the students back to the castle. It had been a miserable and rainy day, and he was looking forward to sitting in front of a fire with a good book. Students were always such time-wasters as far as he was concerned.

Pointing his wand skywards, he sent up a shower of green sparks, high enough for any students to see, before walking to where the carriages would be gathering to take them back to the school. He stood and waited and saw that Potter and Weasley were the first two to arrive back.

'Hello, Professor Snape,' Harry said cheerfully with a wide grin, stuffing a lollipop into his mouth as he and Ron passed Severus and climbed into the first carriage.

More students soon arrived, and as soon as each carriage was filled, it began moving towards the castle. Snape waited until he had counted all of the students as present until he boarded the last carriage, and it too began to drive towards the castle. As he approached, he pulled back a curtain and looked up to the fourth floor to see if Miss Granger had reopened her curtain over the course of the day. She hadn't, and this made him worry just that little bit more. What was it about the witch that drew him to her?

On arriving at the castle, he walked through the oak front doors and immediately made his way up to the fourth floor. It was as though he had no control over what he was doing. Even as his feet led him to approach the portrait of young Morgan Le Fay guarding her door, his mind was focused on how lecherous he was and what a terrible, perverted being he was for being attracted to a student who had recently had a traumatic experience. He announced himself to the portrait anyway, hoping for a response.

The portrait swung open, and a thin, tired-looking Miss Granger stepped out with her arms wrapped around her frame to ward off the cold.

'Can I help you, Professor?' she asked softly.

'You look terrible,' he said, his voice roughened from spending all day out in the cold. 'I know you'd rather not let any of the other students know about the incident a few weeks ago, so may I please enter?'

She sighed and nodded reluctantly. 'Follow me, then,' she said, turning around and going back into her chambers.

Snape followed her gingerly, afraid that the girl would snap and fall to pieces. All he wanted to do was to stop her from starving herself. She gestured to an armchair that was sitting near a coffee table by the fire in her sitting room while she charmed another that was by her curtained window to move back to the fireplace. After she sat down also, she looked at him curiously.

'What was it that you wanted to speak about, Professor?' she asked.

'Your health,' he said simply. 'A lot of the professors have noticed that you are no longer taking care of yourself properly, and none were willing to say anything about it as you are supposed to be an adult capable of caring for yourself.'

'I haven't been having any problems with my health, sir,' she said, looking at her hands, which were rested on her lap.

Snape took her in then. Her curly hair was a bit of a mess, and she was wearing a sweater that she had obviously received from Molly Weasley along with a pair of baggy jeans and thick socks. She wasn't a startling or typical beauty, but there was no doubt that she was a pretty, young woman with such uniqueness and intelligence about her that she did not need to be typically beautiful to shine. But the dullness he saw in her eyes belied the true beauty of those brown depths, and he felt his stomach twist at the thought.

'You are far too thin, and your complexion is much paler than it was a few weeks ago. I realize you are an adult and have the right to do whatever you like with yourself, but do try to act responsibly at the very least,' he told her seriously. 'I want you to take yourself up to Madam Pomfrey and have yourself checked over. I will recommend a nutrient potion for you to take over the next week to help improve your strength.'

'Was that all, sir?' she asked, her bottom lip trembling despite her obvious efforts to prevent him from seeing her distress.

'Miss Granger, you do not have to keep it all to yourself,' he said, his heart pounding in his chest - he was terrible when it came to women crying. 'You don't have to keep things to yourself or pretend that you aren't hurt by what happened.'

'I...' she began, but she stopped almost straight away.

A tear slid down her cheek slowly, over her high cheekbone and along the pale flesh to her chin. His hand reached out instinctively, and his thumb swiped the small bit of

salty moisture away before it could drip onto her clothing. She looked up in surprise, her eyes filled with tears. Before he knew what was happening, he had a lapful of crying witch. He had no idea what to do with his arms but settled for placing them around her in what he hoped came across as only a comforting embrace.

As she sobbed, he slowly rubbed his hands up and down her back, remaining silent and allowing her to release all of the sorrows that she had been bottling up over the past few weeks. Her sobs soon turned to sniffles, and then she was mostly silent, emitting only the occasional hiccup. He pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and pressed it into her hands, gesturing for her to use it.

'And you may keep it,' he said with a smirk. 'I have others.'

'Thank you, Professor,' she mumbled before drying the tears from her face and blowing her nose. 'I apologize for attacking you.'

'Think nothing of it,' he said simply. 'Although, if anyone were to enter your chambers and find the two of us in this position, they would likely think that they had compromised us, so I suggest perhaps a relocation on your part.'

She blushed then, and it stained her pale cheeks pink. As quickly as she had landed atop him, she removed herself from his person and put a safe distance between them once more. He watched as she composed herself more fully, and soon she was sitting in her chair, looking across at the fire emotionlessly. He could tell that she was thinking her brow was furrowed, and she had a look in her eyes that told him that something was going on in her brilliant mind. The sky was no longer light by this point, and the sole source of light in the room came from the warm, crackling fire.

'I must go now, Miss Granger,' he told her. He didn't want to leave, but he knew that he had to for both of their sakes. 'If you ever need to speak to someone or...'

'I understand, sir,' she replied. 'Have a good evening.'

He nodded and pushed himself up and out of the chair, walking briskly to the portrait and pushing it open before leaving her chambers without looking back.

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'Hermione?' Harry asked softly, waving a hand in front of her face.

She looked up at him and smiled a little. 'Yes?' she asked in return.

'Have you seen the paper today?' he asked, offering it to her. 'I think there is something on the front page that you might be interested in reading about.'

She raised her eyebrows at him curiously but accepted the paper nonetheless. She opened it to the front page and very nearly fell off the bench in the Great Hall. The *Daily Prophet* that day had a big picture of Walden McNair and the other man, who apparently was the youngest Carrow, Augustus, printed on it. The title read, DEATH EATERS CAPTURED, and the rest of the story was printed on pages three and four. She flipped quickly, her blood pounding in her veins.

They had been captured just the day before. It had been a Sunday, and she had been unaware that a search had even been undertaken for the two criminals. Reading down a little further, Hermione gasped when she read that it had been Severus Snape that had cornered and apprehended the two of them. She looked to Harry, and he nodded. He understood, and she knew then that even though she had been so secretive, he knew that there had been more to her attack.

She looked up at the Head Table and saw that the Potions master himself was not present at the breakfast table. Without a word, she stood from the table and made a direct beeline for the doors out of the Hall. Once the doors were closed behind her, she practically ran down to the dungeons, and once outside the entry to Snape's chambers, she sent a message through Salazar Slytherin's portrait to ask for permission to enter. Soon enough she heard footsteps, and the portrait swung open.

'Get in quickly,' Snape snapped, grabbing her by the upper arm and pulling her inside.

'Why didn't you say that you were going after McNair?' she demanded as soon as the door was closed behind them.

'I am not accountable to you, Miss Granger,' he said curtly, walking further into the room and dropping into an armchair by the fire. 'My whereabouts are no concern of yours.'

'I have every right!' she snapped, tears burning in her eyes. 'I was the one who was attacked! Me! Not you at all. And you will not treat me like this! I don't care if you are my professor or not!'

'Calm yourself, silly girl,' he said, not looking at her.

She looked at him with such hurt in her eyes. 'You said that I could come to you,' she murmured quietly. 'I thought that you would treat me like an adult.'

There was silence in the room until she finally sat in the empty armchair beside his and began staring into the fire also. He sighed quietly. She was right to want to know why he had gone after McNair. But a source of his had alerted him to an otherwise unreported sighting, and he had known he had to get in and take a chance before losing the trail. He had acted quickly and caught them by surprise. Nobody had been injured aside from a few scrapes and bruises, and Snape had bound them in ropes within two minutes.

'I had to act quickly,' he muttered under his breath. 'I understand that you are upset that I had not said anything to you earlier, but I could not help that.'

She nodded. 'I apologize for snapping, Professor,' she said quietly. 'It just caught me by surprise. It all still feels a little raw...'

'That is perfectly normal, Miss Granger,' Snape assured her. 'I was acting in the interests of the Wizarding world, as well as yours... I know it caused you a great degree of stress.'

'It did,' she agreed. 'But since you spoke to me last month, I've been trying a lot harder... I saw Madam Pomfrey.'

'I know that it must have been difficult for you,' he said softly. 'I appreciate that you took my advice and started taking better care of yourself. Despite what most people believe, I am capable of caring for another person.'

She looked at him suddenly then. 'You care for me?' she asked, her voice trembling.

'I care for you a great deal,' he replied, looking back at her, seeing the glossiness of her brown eyes. 'A great deal more than is appropriate for a teacher to care for one of his students.'

'I care for you that way too,' she said, moving forward in her seat to get closer to him. 'I don't care that you are my professor.'

He saw the imploring look in her eyes and sighed inwardly. She was lovely, and his feelings for her were so foreign to him. He knew it was risky and that it would compromise him and his position at the school as well as hers, but in that moment he didn't care. He moved forward in his seat also and cupped her cheek in his large, warm hand, moving their faces closer together. She smiled at him by way of giving him permission. He smiled back at her before pressing a soft kiss to her lips, letting it linger for only a moment before pulling back.

'This has to be kept between us,' he told her, stroking her bottom lip lightly.

'I understand,' she answered with a nod, moving towards him once more and pressing her lips to his for another gentle kiss.

'Lovely,' he said before claiming her lips for another kiss.

In that long moment between them, he knew that she was well on her way to picking up the broken pieces and putting them back together. And he was going to be with her every step of the way.

End.