

# For the Love of a Good Woman

*by theslacker*

Snape is nothing if not persistent.

## If At First You Don't Succeed

*Chapter 1 of 1*

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Thanks to Flitterkat, comme toujours, for being my beta. This fic follows the p.394 challenge. The quotes I used are as follows:

1. "The duel in which he had so distinguished himself had not made him forget his invitation to lunch with the attorney's wife."

-Alexandre Dumas, père, *The Three Musketeers* [trans. by Lord Sudley]

2. "He reached the fence just as the fugitive was climbing over it."

-Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* [trans. by Richard Pevear & Larissa Volokhonsky]

3. "'You beast!'"

-Matthew Skelton, *Endymion Spring*

4. "Any time you say."

-Daphne du Maurier, *Rebecca*

5. "All as strictly logical as a chess game."

-Adam Gopnik, *The King in the Window*

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"I'd love to help you, Severus, you know I would," said Lucius, "but I've got lunch with Sophia Hagia."

"The attorney's wife?" asked Snape, puzzled.

"Not that it's really any of your business, but yes," said Lucius. "Best of luck, Severus."

"Not so fast!" snarled Snape, grasping onto Lucius' hair before he could pull out of the Floo connexion. "You never lunch before one-thirty. You have plenty of time to help me out here before anyone would even suggest that you were running late for your rendez-vous with Madam Hagia. My future happiness depends on this. Get over here *right now*."

"Of course, Severus," Lucius choked out. "Any time you say."

Moments later, Lucius Malfoy stood on the hearth, brushing the soot from his robes.

"So, what exactly are you planning, Severus?"

Snape plunged his hands deep into the pockets of his robes, shoulders raised. He reminded Lucius of nothing so much as a difficult teenager.

"Hermione said no," he mumbled angrily to the floor.

"Sorry? Hermione Granger? Said no to what?"

"My proposal!" Snape snarled.

"What sort of proposal?" asked Lucius. Snape was such an unfriendly sort. It was fun to bait him. "Business? Study?"

"Of marriage, you halfwit!"

Lucius was unperturbed by Snape's rude reaction. He had known Snape for years and had come to expect nothing less than the height of bad manners from the man.

"Really, Severus?" he drawled. "Are you as charming with her as you are with me? I can't imagine why she would refuse you."

Snape glowered at him. "Fortunately," he ground out, "I have a plan. Unfortunately, you are instrumental to its success."

Lucius blinked. Really, the tenacity of Severus Snape was astounding. He cast back in his mind. Surely, this had to be the fourth time Granger had turned him down?

"You will challenge me to a duel," Snape announced.

"Severus? What in hell's name?"

"You will cast the Agathaes Gunaikos Curse on me."

"Are you sure that's wise?" asked Lucius in surprise. "So many things could go wrong."

Snape moved to sit on the couch. "It's perfect," he declared, crossing his arms over his chest. "She thinks I don't need her. She's knowledgeable enough that she'll recognise the spell. She'll know that only she can keep me alive. It ought to make her feel needed, don't you think?"

There was a pause, then, "You're not serious," said Lucius, reaching for the Floo powder. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I have more important things to do than listen to round four of the sob story that is your relationship with Hermione Granger."

Snape stood and grasped Lucius' wrist. "I am dead serious," he hissed.

Lucius raised his eyebrows. "You'd better have this plan mapped out damn well," he said. He took a seat.

Snape settled down across from him. "Of course I do," he said. "I'll go to Hagrid's, chat with him a bit, mope about Hermione. Then you'll barge in and challenge me to a duel. Hagrid will attempt to dissuade me from accepting, but in my inconsolably despairing state, I will take you up on your offer, even suggest that we begin at that instant. Once we walk outside to begin, Hagrid will alarm Hermione. She will soon arrive, and you will cast the Agathaes Gunaikos."

"Hagrid's in on it?"

Snape shook his head. "No, but the man's as predictable as Saturday's match."

Chudley Cannons versus Montrose Magpies. Not worth buying a ticket for, it would be over so fast.

"Oh, couldn't you get someone else to do this for you, Severus?"

"Certainly not. Everybody knows of our tendency to have quarrels which get out of hand, and Hermione is quite aware of the fact that some of our arguments have had near-fatal conclusions."

"But, Severus, we haven't had disagreement of those proportions for some time."

"It will be believable," Snape said firmly. "Hermione will rush to my side, and Robert's your father's brother."

"Actually," muttered Lucius, inspecting his glove, "his name's Valerius." He was rather hoping Snape would give him a chance to grab another pair of gloves first. He was rather fond of these...kid leather, and all...and wasn't keen on throwing one away on a mock duel with Severus Snape.

Snape was unconcerned by kid gloves. Studying the far corner of his dungeon room's stone walls, he muttered sternly to himself, "All as strictly logical as a chess game."

Lucius wasn't convinced.

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"Ermione! Ye've got ter come quick! Sev'rus is in trouble!"

Hermione rolled her eyes, but she didn't lift her head from her work. She didn't have the time for Snape's antics right now. "What has he done this time?" she growled.

"He's duelin' Lucius Malfoy right in front of me hut!"

Suddenly, her paper didn't seem so important.

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Just as Hermione emerged from Hagrid's hut, Lucius sent off the curse with a flourish, and Snape crumpled to the ground.

She ran to him, falling to her knees in the grass next to him. His eyes were glassy and unseeing. "Severus." She pulled his head into her lap and stroked his hair. "Severus." Her mind was racing, putting together Lucius' wand movement, the colour of the curse...

"Agathaes Gunaikos!" she breathed, horrified. Her head whipped around to face Lucius. "He'll die!" she shouted at him.

"Especially if you just sit there," he agreed.

Hermione gave him a look of pure hatred before she bent her head to Snape's.

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Hermione was kissing him, and it was glorious. Should his plan fail, leaving him to die, it would be worth it for Hermione's kiss. It was far better than he'd imagined it would be. His pulse shot into overdrive as he lifted an arm around her and attempted to work her mouth open with his own, but she pulled away suddenly.

"What," Snape heard her say, though he was finding it difficult to focus on her words, "were you *twidwits* fighting about?"

Snape fumbled for an answer. Had he planned an answer to that? God, he wanted to kiss her again.

She turned to Lucius. "Well?" she demanded. Lucius looked blankly toward Snape. The silence lasted too long.

"You are an idiot, Snape," Hermione whispered fiercely, "and I should have known this was another of your stupid post-rejection games. I never realised you'd go so far. Well, it's backfired splendidly now, hasn't it?" She pushed herself up to her feet, letting his head bang onto the ground. His "ouch" sounded a bit pathetic.

Lucius thought perhaps he ought to give Snape a hand, even if he had been a fool. "You do realise he won't survive without you?" he said.

"Oh yes," said Hermione impatiently, "he will quickly fade without my touch. I am well aware. And I'm sure that the two of you were equally aware when you planned this."

"He planned it," corrected Lucius, "and forced me to participate, though he knew very well that I have plans this afternoon." The duel in which he had so distinguished himself had not made him forget his invitation to lunch with the attorney's wife.

Snape groaned and rolled over, hiding his face in the grass.

"Well, don't let me keep you, Mr. Malfoy," responded Hermione scathingly. "I'm sure that the time of Witch Weekly's Most Eligible Bachelor is not his own."

Piqued by this comment, Lucius strode away in a huff, leaving Hermione next to Snape's prostrate form. Neither moved.

"Brilliant, Snape," she said. "I should just let you die."

"You won't do that," Snape mumbled into the ground.

"Pardon me?" asked Hermione angrily.

Snape stood up and took Hermione by the shoulders. "I said you won't do that," he said forcefully. He couldn't let the plan fail simply because it hadn't worked as he'd intended. He kissed her.

In the space of three seconds, she had pulled back, slapped him hard across the face, and run off in the direction of Hagrid's fenced garden. He stood shocked for a moment before running after her. He reached the fence just as the fugitive was climbing over it.

"Granger!" he insisted, putting his hands about her waist and pulling her back. "Where do you think you're going?"

"You beast!" she cried, twisting about and pounding upon his chest with her fists. "Why did you do it?"

He looked perplexedly at her. "You said I didn't need you," he said.

"But now you need me too much!" she said. Her shoulders slumped as her hands collapsed to her sides. There were tears in her eyes. "Now it's a matter of life or death!"

"It's actually not much different," he said stiffly.

"Oh," she said softly. Then she began to cry in earnest. Awkwardly, he held out an arm in invitation, unsure what her reaction might be were he to bundle her into his arms as he wished to. He needn't have worried. She moved instantly into his embrace, kissing him wetly through her tears, and it was wonderful. He could kiss her for eternity.

"Marry me, Granger?"