

Experience

by nata

The world gets smaller as Hermione lets Severus open her eyes.

One-shot

Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: Thanks to JKR for providing the playing field.

Author's notes: Gift for Slytherin Head of House at OWL, Annie Talbot, for working with us to make the words "Slytherin" and "sweet" fit into one sentence.

Genuine Annie-prompt, sneakily snatched from the 2008 SSHG Exchange by bluestocking: Immediately post-Epilogue: Hermione learns that the Unspeakables rescued Snape from the Shrieking Shack and have been keeping him in the Department of Mysteries, researching the Dark magic that resides within him. She breaks him out, but is caught and has to take him on the run. No camping allowed.

Big thanks to Pyjama Pants for the lightning-speed beta.

"Good gracious, Mrs Weasley." A jovial man startled Hermione as she rounded a corner. "I wasn't expecting a visitor down here at this ungodly hour."

"Good evening, Mr Croaker," she said, as she leaned against the corner, theatrically placing a hand on her breastbone. "I thought I was alone, myself. It seems both our projects ran a little later than is reasonable to stay at work."

"So sorry to startle you." Mr Croaker appeared placated enough to accept her meagre excuse. While it was true that she occasionally had legitimate reasons for staying late, her day's pass to the Department had long run its course.

"What brought you to the Department of Mysteries this time, my dear? Not the old debate about which brain an intellectual property belongs to, is it?"

Hermione shifted a little bit as she felt a hand search for access into her sleeve. The gentle touch tickled her wrist and continued up along her forearm. She quickly shook her wand from its holster to prevent being discovered. The hand slid the wand out completely, and Hermione felt the power of a spell brush the halo of her hair.

Mr Croaker crumbled quietly to the floor like a pile of rags.

"What do you think you are doing?" Hermione swirled around, hands braced against her waist.

"Getting us out of here."

"But a Stunner? They will come after us now. Confundus would have been enough!"

"Hardly, Miss Granger."

"It's Weasley, Snape," she barked.

"You are forgetting I was working here for over fifteen years."

"If you call sitting in a grey cell working, be my guest and return there."

"No chance." Severus shook his head. "All spells in the Department are recorded. Someone is checking on it now, and if they figure out it was not part of *working*, they will send a squad. Move." He propelled her forward.

They ran.

Sitting in a pale blue chair by an open window, Hermione lifted her hair and let the gentle breeze cool her neck. They had closed the blinds to keep sunshine out, but it was still very hot.

"What did you do to get locked in, Snape?"

Severus pattered about in the kitchen, opening cans and assembling a machine. He did not give a sign that he had heard.

Hermione gave up. It was easier to drop the subject than listen to the tirade. She had enough on her mind as it was. They were sought after as dangerous criminals capable of Dark magic. It was ridiculous, really. Only that was the official charge, regardless of the fact that both of them were decorated war heroes. One supposedly post mortem, so there could have been a note of Dark magic, she would give them that.

"I was too good at my job."

Hermione startled. "What?"

"You asked. I answered."

"Thank you, I guess. Still. Why did they lock you in?"

Severus frowned as he walked into the room with two tiny cups with dark brown foam on top. "To research Dark magic." He handed her one cup.

"Oh. What is that?" Hermione took the cup, carefully avoiding touching her companion. She sniffed. "Coffee? A drop?"

"Ristretto. We are in Italy."

They walked side by side along a dirt road lined with large trees with round crowns. An occasional car passed them, but they marched on.

"Why can't we Apparate there?" Hermione blew a stray lock away from her eyes.

"Tracking," Severus said.

"I'm tired."

He stopped immediately.

She almost collided into him, not expecting him to acknowledge her.

He pointedly looked at her, and when she took a step back, he reached up and plucked a large yellow fruit from a tree.

"Peel it and eat it," he said and sat down leaning against the trunk.

"What is it?"

"A mango."

Hermione set on the ground cross-legged, bit into the fruit and peeled away the outer layer with her teeth. She licked the juice from her lip and moaned.

"This is fantastic. Do you want some?" She took a bite without waiting for a reply. "How do you know which village to go to in all of India? We could have been just as safe in a large city."

Severus sighed. "Have you quite forgotten what happened yesterday, when you got the love letter from your beau?"

"He is my husband and father of my children, and I will thank you to remember it." Hermione acted more affronted than she felt. Ron had sent a Howler complaining that she left him to take care of the children. As if Rose and Hugo weren't his, too.

No matter how upset she was, she still felt a pang of regret. She should have asked questions first and acted after. But seeing Snape alive and under lock and key in the Department of Mysteries, she had assumed they were researching the miracle of his survival. At the moment, she just knew he deserved a second chance to live.

She wished she had asked questions then. Now she was hunted because she had gotten herself involved with Dark magic.

The mango tasted bitter suddenly.

"I have found some tea leaves, but they smell weird. Care to take a look, Snape?"

Severus walked closer, leaned over her shoulder and said, "Fill up a gourd with it, boil a litre of water and find a metal straw."

"But I just want a cup of tea!"

"These are yerba maté leaves. It's meant to be refilled with hot water and shared. Deal with it," he said and turned on his heel.

Hermione fumed, but followed the instructions. She looked at the soggy leaves with suspicion and took a tentative sip.

"Arg! That's foul."

"Bring it over, Granger."

"It's Weasley," she protested, repeatedly swallowing.

"It gets better with the second refill." Severus took the gourd from her and sucked on the silver straw she had just had in her mouth.

She swallowed once more, her throat feeling rusty.

She blinked and gathered her senses. "How do you know so much about Argentina, too?"

"I have been here before."

"When did you manage?"

"A few years back."

"But but you said that you were in the Department of Mysteries for fifteen years. I found you locked in a cell. Don't you dare tell me that you could have left any time. I lost my children because of you."

"Cease the melodrama. You will get back to them soon enough." Severus finished the maté, refilled the gourd and passed it over to Hermione. "They patched me up and set me to work on international intelligence."

"And then what? Were you locked in or not?"

"I was. For over three years."

"Why then? Why did I risk letting you out?"

"I told you. They researched Dark magic."

Hermione had an impression that they had just had their most amicable discussion to date, even though it left her unsatisfied. She took a sip of maté and found out that she could bear it.

Severus nudged Hermione's shoulder with a white mug half-filled with clear liquid. She took it without looking up, sobbing out a hardly understandable *Thank you*. She curled her fingers around the mug, and finding it cold, looked up.

"It's vodka," Severus said.

"Half a mug?"

"A normal Russian comfort drink. It will do you good, Mrs Weasley."

A strangled cry escaped Hermione. "I guess you could call me Granger now."

"Probably." Severus dipped a finger into his own mug and flicked a drop of vodka over his shoulder. Only then did he gulp down the alcohol, exhaling as he set the mug down. He picked a piece of bread and took a hearty bite.

Hermione watched and tried to copy his routine. She ended up coughing and sputtering.

"Take this," Severus offered. "Eat."

"Water," Hermione croaked.

"No. Eat. You'll feel sick otherwise."

"I should have seen it coming. It was in the making for quite some time," she confessed.

Severus refilled his mug and offered the bottle to Hermione. She shook her head.

"I'll have to return home," she said after a considerable pause. "He filed for transferring the full custody of our children to me. I have to go back to take care of them."

"You will be prosecuted."

"I know."

She slumped in her chair and hung her head between her shoulders. Tear tracks started to dry on her cheeks, but her eyes were red and swollen.

"What will I be facing? You have to tell me now."

"I told you already."

"All you said was that they'd locked you in to study magic that enabled you to do your job well. You will have to do better than that. It doesn't make much sense."

Severus sighed. "They noticed that I could cope in any part of the world and adapt easily. They thought it must have been a new form of Dark magic that seeped into me when a Horcrux bit me."

Hermione shook her head. "That's ridiculous."

"So I tried to tell them."

"And?"

Severus lifted the mug to his lips again, and after eating the bread, he said, "My predecessor resigned after he almost starved to death on a mission to Japan. He couldn't eat with chopsticks. I didn't have serious mishaps for too long and just carried on completing my assignments. Apparently, comprehending differences between cultures is so incomprehensible to Unspeakables that they deemed my lack of complications a mystery involving Dark magic. Nothing I said made any difference."

Hermione gasped, a fierce look in her eyes. Shortly, she jumped up. "I'll make them drop it."

Dear Harry,

I'm coming back home. Please set a date of hearing with the Wizengamot. I'm ready to face the charges for freeing Severus Snape.

Give my love to Ginny and the kids.

Love,

