

The Bookmark

by Eridanus

A Christmas gift causes Hermione to misunderstand a few things.

Chapter One: Christmas

Chapter 1 of 2

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A/N: My second attempt at writing fanfiction. I'm sorry it took so long, but I hope you all like it. My Beta, Amy Louise, is by far the most wonderful beta you could wish for. Her help and support is invaluable. Thank you.

If I was J.K. Rowling... But I'm not, so let's not go there.

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Christmas

There were only a few times in the life of Hermione Granger when her heart had beaten this wildly. When she had arrived at Hogwarts for the very first time. When Viktor Krum revealed his true intentions in going to the library and had asked her to the Yule Ball. When Ron had leaned in to kiss her for the first time (what a disappointment that had been). When she had been offered a position at Hogwarts.

And now.

Her fingers caressed the soft piece of fabric in her hand as she walked through the corridors of Hogwarts, trying hard to contain her eagerness. She'd ~~known~~ ^{new} there was something. She had known since he'd handed her the box of Chocoballs at Halloween. She hadn't even opened her mouth to ask for them when he handed it to her. Their hands had brushed and she'd *known*.

There was something there, and the proof was in her hand. The gift was so utterly perfect. A perfect Christmas present, really. It wasn't too flashy, or too obvious, yet it showed an innate knowledge of her love for books (she ignored the fact that her bookworm tendencies were common knowledge).

He'd given her the most perfect little bookmark. Periwinkle blue, almost the exact same shade as the dress she'd worn at the Yule Ball in her fourth year. Hand-stitched on it was a small book, and if you looked closely at it you could see the words *Hogwarts, A History* written on the book. She'd spent the rest of Christmas Day in her old room at her parents' house, staring at the little piece of fabric. Her parents hadn't been too worried. As long as she wasn't out chasing dark wizards they couldn't complain.

Hermione stroked the fine stitching again. She'd returned from the Christmas break early to properly thank him. Her friends had been understandably disappointed, but she'd been so distracted that not even little James, who'd just turned one, could capture her attention for more than a minute.

She stopped in front of the staffroom entrance. It seemed almost empty without the gargoyles, but they'd been destroyed beyond repair in the war. Instead, they'd been replaced by a painting of two nymphs frolicking at the seaside. She gave them the password (Adonis), and with a giggle, they let her in.

It was like being back in Gryffindor Tower. Situated around the room, in the mismatched sofas and armchairs, were most of the other staff members. Some were

conversing, some were playing chess, and Madam Hooch was polishing her broomstick, throwing lewd glances at anyone who dared look at her.

Hermione located her target in the corner closest to the fire. Sitting in a squashy armchair, his face was mostly hidden by the periodical in his hands. She strode over to him, briefly greeting her co-workers on the way.

She stopped in front of him and cleared her throat. His eyes stopped moving over the pages, but he didn't look up. "Headmaster Snape," she prompted, but he still didn't look up. "Sir..."

"I heard you the first time, Professor Granger," he interrupted. "I was merely hoping that you would take the hint, and leave me to my reading." He demonstratively turned a page, and his eyes resumed their path across the page.

Hermione's hand clenched around the bookmark. "I just wanted to thank you, sir," she said hurriedly. "For the bookmark. It was a truly wonderful gift. I... thank you."

He looked up at her for the first time since she'd entered, a curious frown on his face at the sight of her flushed cheeks. He folded the periodical with a snap. "You are welcome, Professor. But pray, do not get emotional. I gave the same gift to all the other professors; they were on sale."

Hermione's mouth fell open, as mortification overwhelmed her. He hadn't bought the gift for her. Or rather, he had, but she... she had misunderstood his intentions. She looked around the room, and her gaze fell upon the book Flitwick was reading. A bookmark in the same periwinkle blue peeked out between the pages. Within seconds she had located three other books with that kind of bookmark peeking out. She looked back at Snape. His lips twitched.

"It is customary for the Headmaster to present his staff members with a Christmas gift. Albus always gave us lemon drops, but I decided to go for something more useful. I am... glad to hear you liked it." He crossed his long legs, and Hermione felt her gaze drawn to his foot, tapping an unknown beat in the air. The urge to flee was almost overwhelming.

She was just about to turn to leave when he spoke again: "I do, however, thank you for your present. The crystal vials will be very useful in my further research." He unfolded the periodical and resumed reading, effectively dismissing her.

Hermione turned and walked to the door, trying with each step to get her emotions under control. He had liked her present, but he hadn't bought the bookmark especially for *her*. She raised her hand to open the door and noticed that it shook. She grabbed the doorknob to stop the tremors. She had been embarrassed, and she didn't like it.

She was stopped, halfway out in the hall, by a hand on her shoulder. She turned and looked into the kind eyes of Professor McGonagall. The professor closed the door behind them, leaving them alone in the quiet hall. Even the nymphs stayed respectfully silent. "My dear, I hope you don't mind," she said in a low voice. "I overheard a titbit of your conversation with Severus."

"I..."

"Did you give our dear headmaster a Christmas present?" Hermione nodded, somewhat dumbstruck. "Oh, dearest, I hope it wasn't too expensive. The staff usually pool together to buy the Headmaster a gift. Didn't Madam Hooch tell you?"

"No," Hermione whispered. "No, she didn't."

"She must have forgotten, I'm sure. I'm sure Severus..." She was interrupted by the opening of the portrait behind her. Horace Slughorn stuck his head out.

"Minerva, it has been your move for several minutes now. Will you be returning, or shall I count this as my first victory ever?" His thick moustache vibrated as he tittered at his own humour.

"Excuse me, Hermione, but I cannot let Horace beat me at chess." She grabbed Hermione's hand and patted it, frowning at the bookmark still clutched in her hand. "If you have need, you know where my quarters are." Her lips stretched into a thin smile. "You were always such a clever student, but in matters of the heart..."

"Thank you, Professor McGonagall," Hermione replied curtly, removing her hand from her former professor's. "Next year I'll contact Madam Hooch regarding Christmas presents." And with that, she turned and left.

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Back in her quarters, she flung the bookmark down, disappointed when it only floated silently to the floor. She had not only embarrassed herself in front of the object of her affection but also inadvertently revealed to her mentor – and Merlin knew who else – that she had inappropriate feelings for her employer.

Her lower lip trembled, but she told herself that crying would do her no good. Instead, she picked up the bookmark, smoothed it, and put it in her pocket as a reminder.

A/N: Next chapter will be up in a few days. Thank you for reading.

Chapter Two: Valentine's Day

Chapter 2 of 2

A Valentine's Ball causes more misunderstandings.

A/N: My second attempt at writing fanfiction. My Beta, Amy Louise, is by far the most wonderful beta you could wish for. Her help and support is invaluable. Thank you.

If I was J.K. Rowling... But I'm not, so let's not go there.

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Valentine's Day

It would seem decidedly out of character for the current headmaster of Hogwarts, one Severus Snape, to be having a Valentine's Ball for the students. Indeed, many wondered at the strange decision and attributed it to love potions and the like.

The truth was that the Board of Governors, many of whom had teenage children at the school, had succumbed to the pressure of their progeny to throw a ball and thus had

pressured the headmaster into this uncharacteristic decision. So Hogwarts held a Valentine's Ball for the students, albeit without the singing dwarfs.

The students, however, were thrilled at the opportunity to dance, drink punch, and snog their little hearts out.

Hermione Granger stayed in the corner of the hall where she could keep an eye on the punchbowl. She didn't have high expectations for Valentine's Day, though she had received a few Valentine's cards. One from a third-year Hufflepuff, who'd taken a particular shine to her. One from a seventh-year Gryffindor, who'd written a lewd poem. One from little James Potter, though Hermione suspected that Ginny had written it for him. She'd put that one on the mantelpiece. She'd also received one from one of the clerks at Flourish & Blotts, but it was addressed 'To my Dearest Harmony', so she didn't really take it any more seriously than the others. Instead, she resolved to stare at the punchbowl for the rest of the evening.

An hour went by as couple after couple twirled by her, resplendent in their finest robes. It was really quite depressing. She'd only attended two balls in her life: the Yule Ball, where Ron had accused her of 'fraternizing with the enemy'; and the Victory Ball, where she'd gotten so drunk she'd expelled the contents of her stomach right in front of a photographer from The Daily Prophet. Rita Skeeter had had a field day.

Her third ball, and she was chaperoning. Staring at the punchbowl and wearing her nicest but most unremarkable robes, she felt a little low. She'd stomped down on her feelings since the disaster at Christmas, but a small part of her had hoped....

Was it just her, or had the punch changed colour? She should check it out.

She was just about to take a sniff of the punch to see if something was amiss when a rustle behind her stopped her. She whipped around to look into the smirking visage of the headmaster.

"Would you care to dance, Professor Granger?" He held out his hand. Hermione glanced back at the punch - the colour had most definitely changed, she was sure - but before she could voice her concerns, he spoke again: "I wouldn't worry about the punch." His hand came up to rest on the small of her back as he led her to the dance floor. The slight pressure sent tendrils of warmth all the way through her body.

He was an excellent dancer, she could tell, even though they mostly just swayed. He kept her at an appropriate distance, not too close. Her heartbeat was so strong and fast, she feared she would pass out right there on the floor. His thumb stroked her back, but it was over so quickly it might as well have been a twitch.

"Are you familiar with the Antibius Potion, Professor Granger?" he asked. She wracked her brain.

"I think I've read about it somewhere," she answered, and he raised his eyebrow at her in a look that clearly said *Of course you have!* "It renders alcohol useless, right?"

"Not only that," he murmured, smirking. He was clearly very pleased with himself. "I added some to the punchbowl. Should a student find it in himself to add alcohol to the punch, not only will he not achieve the results he set out for, but it will also render the punch undrinkable." She noticed his eyes follow a certain student through the hall: Mr. Bray, fifth-year, Gryffindor. A troublemaker, the like of which would make Fred and George Weasley green with envy.

As it was, she felt green with envy that Mr. Bray garnered more attention from Snape than she did. Distracted by her own thoughts, Hermione accidentally trod on his toes.

He winced, but his gaze returned to her. A piece of heart-shaped confetti landed on his brow, but he flicked it away with a look of disgust. Clearly, he hadn't been in charge of the decorations.

"Have you received many Valentine's cards, Professor?" he asked, and she flushed at the sudden hope that maybe, just maybe, he'd sent her a card, and it had gotten lost in the mail. She had of course considered sending him one, but after the disaster at Christmas, she hadn't dared.

Before she could answer the question he had posed, the song was over, and he'd returned her to the crowd and disappeared. She stared out at the crowd but couldn't see him anywhere. Instead, she found Madam Pomfrey making her way towards her, a glass of punch in her hand. "He's a wonderful dancer, isn't he?" she asked Hermione, throwing a significant glance out on the dance floor. Hermione followed her gaze and saw something that made her racing heart drop to her stomach.

Snape was dancing with...

"Trelawney?" she whispered in disbelief. The couple on the floor turned slightly, and she saw the sneer of distaste on the headmaster's face. Trelawney, it would seem, was having a splendid time as she nattered on, clinging to Snape's robes. Hermione felt a little lighter at the thought that Snape would probably have done well to put some of the Antibius Potion in Trelawney's sherry.

Madam Pomfrey tittered, clearly thinking the same thing. "He always dances with all the female staff-members. Some of the students tried asking him a few years ago, as a joke, but the amount of points lost made sure that that never happened again."

Hermione thought that made sense. They were a bit too young to remember Snape as a teacher, and those who did had apparently forgotten. But he'd clearly established a level of respect, as not even a curious glance was thrown at the sight of the headmaster and the batty professor. Something was niggling in the corners of her brain, though. "I've never seen him dance before tonight...."

"No, you wouldn't have," Madam Pomfrey said, taking a sip from her cup. With a wince, she set it down on a nearby table. "It would seem Mr. Bray has once again tried his luck against the Antibius Potion." She looked out into the crowd again, to see Snape disentangle himself from Trelawney then stride over to Professor McGonagall, who was wearing an indulgent smile. "It is, you could say, the Headmaster's duty to dance with all the female staff members. It doesn't say so in the rules, but it has been tradition since the short period in the 1600s where female professors were prohibited. A show of tolerance for the other sex, so to speak."

Hermione felt a little queasy. So he'd danced with her *as a show of tolerance*? She felt the overwhelming need to either faint or leave the Great Hall. She excused herself from the concerned matron.

Being in love with your boss sucked.

A/N: The Antibius Potion was inspired by Disulfiram, a drug that has pretty much the same effect as the potion. It is used to treat chronic alcoholism. In Denmark we call it Antabus, and as you've probably deduced the name of the potion came from that. My dear friend and muse, Marc, inspired not only this story, but also the name of the potion. I also stole his last name for the mischievous fifth-year, Mr. Bray.

Thank you for reading.