

It's All in the Presentation

by sunny33

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: They aren't mine, but at least they can cook.

*A/N: What follows is completely AU. Everyone is alive, even those who probably shouldn't be. *cough* Dumbledore *cough* Hermione has been smoking something dodgy and is not herself. Be warned.*

Lavender Brown tossed her bag onto the floor and threw herself onto her bed, ever the drama queen. "What was the daft old goat thinking? Cooking? This is a school of witchcraft and wizardry, not a bloody restaurant. Do you think he's gone a bit touched in the head since old Voldemort up and *Avada*'ed himself by mistake? I suppose it was a bit of a letdown after all his scheming over the last few years, but a cooking competition? For Merlin's sake, it's ridiculous!" She looked to her roommates for reassurance. "You think so too, don't you?"

Parvati scowled. "I've never had to cook before. That's what house-elves are for. And don't give me that look, Hermione, it's what we're used to, okay?"

Hermione Granger sighed as she sat on her own bed. "Yes, I know. They need to serve to be happy. I've learned that lesson, trust me. It took years before I was allowed back in the kitchens. But I agree with Lavender. Dumbledore has finally lost it. Making us participate in a cooking competition, just because he's discovered television and *Ready Steady Cook*."

"What is *Ready Steady Cook*, anyway, Hermione?" asked Lavender, who'd only discovered television herself a few months earlier.

"It's a television show where celebrities have a budget of five pounds to spend on a few ingredients that they bring in to the show. They are paired with the show's chefs and then have twenty minutes to cook a three-course meal from the ingredients and the basic staples already in the kitchen. We don't even get chefs to work with! It's just us."

"Surely you've done some cooking, Hermione? Please tell us you've done some cooking, or we're sunk before we start," Parvati pleaded.

"I've done a little, but only basics. We won't even know what ingredients we'll get until the competition starts. At least we'll have half an hour, not just twenty minutes, and we only have to make two courses."

"Fat lot of good that'll do, especially with Snape as one of the judges. Why did Dumbledore choose *him*?" Lavender wailed.

"It's obvious. Potions and cooking are fairly similar. Chopping, weighing, stirring, and heating. Although I wouldn't put it past the Headmaster to have chosen him as a judge just to annoy him. Especially when the other judge is Remus Lupin. Those two have never seen eye to eye," Parvati pronounced. "So, Hermione. You're the brains here. What do we do?"

Hermione had been sitting quietly, a disturbing smirk on her face as the other two discussed the judges. "I think I know just how to impress them. But first, we need to eliminate some of the competition. Come closer, girls, I have a plan.

"First, we need to figure out who will be the most competition. I suspect the Slytherins will be too pureblood and too spoilt to recognise one end of a wooden spoon from another. Can you imagine Draco Malfoy or Pansy Parkinson whipping up a meal?"

Lavender giggled. "Whipping each other maybe, but cooking? No. No competition. I'm sure even I could do better than Parkinson."

An evil grin crossed Parvati's face as she joined the conversation again. "I know Padma and her friends. They're all so wrapped up in their books and doing things according to the rules, even those who can cook would never have the imagination to come up with a meal in thirty minutes unless they had recipes in front of them. It's the Hufflepuffs with their homely ways and our male housemates we'll have to watch out for."

Hermione's mouth curled into an even more evil grin. "But we can play the Snape card."

"The Snape card?" both girls asked as one.

"Neville still nearly wets himself whenever Professor Snape is near. Ron is a blithering idiot when it comes to Potions, so I imagine he'll be useless at cooking. Harry, we'll have to watch. He had to cook a lot for his relatives, so he'll know his way around a frying pan. The Hufflepuffs are all terrified of Professor Snape. We just need to remind them and Neville often enough that he will be judging them."

"But *we're* not immune to Snape either," Lavender whined.

"Speak for yourself. I'm not scared of him, and you shouldn't be either, girls. If we want to beat the others we have to stick together and not let him get to us." Hermione met each girl's eyes squarely and nodded. "Now, how do we deal with Harry?"

"Easy. We let Neville and Ron do it for us. With them on Harry's team, we can't go wrong." Parvati frowned. "But we still have to cook something halfway decent ourselves."

"I'll research some basic cooking books and get some ideas. Okay, let's get out there and instil the fear of Severus Snape into anyone who will listen!"

Four weeks later, the girls had made it into the final. As predicted, they were up against Harry, Ron, and Neville. The Slytherins had eliminated themselves by virtue of sheer incompetence in the first round. Terry Boot's Ravenclaw boys had wasted half their time arguing about the best way to peel a potato, and the girls from their house had managed to make a perfect custard, but with no idea of how to cook chicken from scratch had nearly poisoned the judges. The Hufflepuffs, quivering in their boots, had made it into the third round, but slunk off defeated after some particularly nasty glares from their Potions professor. The rumour circulating the school about Snape's nocturnal activities hadn't helped.

"Right, girls, what have we got?" Lavender tied on her apron and opened the bag of ingredients, confidence much boosted by her successful crepes the previous week. "Oh, bloody hell. Four sausages, four potatoes, a bar of chocolate, two bananas, a small tub of ice-cream, and a peach. How do we make something exotic out of that lot?"

"Let me see." Hermione took the items out of the bag. "Oh, I think we can do something very *special* with these. Right, Lavender, there are onions in the pantry we all share; grab two and slice them very finely. Parvati, peel the potatoes and get them in a saucepan to boil. I need to make a roux sauce."

"A what?"

"Butter, flour, and milk. One of the few things mum taught me. Now, get on with it!"

Twenty-three minutes later, the sausages were nicely browned, the potatoes were cooked and mashed to a creamy consistency, and the onions were lightly sautéed. A jug of smooth, white sauce was under a Warming Charm, and the plates were set out ready.

"So, what *is* your special trick?" Lavender asked.

"You'll see, but first let me borrow that lipstick I know you keep in your pocket, Lav." Taking the tube, Hermione applied it to her lips, then, with her back turned to the judges, unbuttoned her blouse until a generous amount of cleavage was visible above her apron. Risking a quick glance over to the boys, who appearing to be arguing over how their meal was to be presented, she smiled at her teammates.

"*Hermione!* How is this helping? It's *Snape!*" hissed Parvati.

"You'd be surprised," Hermione murmured, then started arranging the food on the plate. Using a large serving spoon, she swiftly created two mounds of potato, each topped with a round cut from one of the sausages. A small blob of tomato sauce completed the effect.

"That looks just like..."

"Shh, Lavender." Hermione winked as she formed some more potato into two smaller oval piles on the other side of the plate with a wedge shaped piece in the middle. Atop the centre piece, she carefully placed a sausage, proudly pointing up at an angle in the direction of the larger mounds.

"That's disgusting! And hilarious. Do you think they'll...?" Parvati asked.

"Oh, I'm sure they will," Hermione replied. "Especially when I add the final touches."

"Which are?"

"These." She covered the two smaller piles of potato with the thin curls of fried onions and then dropped teaspoonfuls of white sauce over the larger piles. As Lavender and Parvati stood carefully obstructing both the judges' and their opponents' views, Hermione scooped out some ice cream and, using the banana and halved peach, proceeded to create a similar sculpture on the dessert plate.

"Time is up, ladies and gentlemen!" called Remus Lupin. "Stand back from your benches."

Hermione grinned at her partners and stood back, making eye contact with Lupin for the first time that evening as he approached. She watched his struggle not to allow his gaze to settle lower and deliberately licked her lips. His soft groan was inaudible to all but the three young women, two of whom were standing with mouths agape at their usually swotty, sexless friend's antics.

After staring long and hard at their offerings, Lupin took a jagged breath and walked somewhat stiffly to the boys' bench, allowing Severus Snape to take his turn at judging the girls.

"What do you think, Professor? Does it make you *hungry*?" asked Hermione as she placed a finger into her mouth and slowly drew it out.

Snape was much better at hiding his reaction to the lascivious tableau, but even he appeared to have a little trouble swallowing as he walked away.

"Hermione? Did you just do what I think you just did?" Lavender demanded.

"What do you think I just did?"

"Proposition Professors Snape and Lupin."

Hermione just smiled as their triumph was announced. "Perhaps." *Or maybe I was just reminding them...*

A/N: Saturday night drabble prompt from peppermint: Remus, Hermione, and a Hogwarts cooking contest. Smut encouraged. As the chat had been focussing on food porn, it seemed only fitting to use food itself as porn. Thanks to KingPhilipsWench for the beta.