

Carpe Diem, Part Two

by ConstantComment

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The Only One

Chapter 1 of 1

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Author's Note: I'm baaaaack!

Chapter One: The Only One

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The castle loomed a mile high in the late morning sun, a jungle of towers and bridges and flying buttresses jutting into the crystal blue heavens as Hermione Granger squinted up at it. She had left her parents' right after one o'clock, postulating that if Hogwarts had not changed its lunch schedule for hundreds of years, he would be easy enough to talk to... and maybe even a little easier to convince. Hermione was well aware that *that* man without food or at least caffeine was quite a... challenge.

Hermione chuckled to herself, resting her hands on her hips as she stepped into the shadow of her old home.

*Not that he wasn't a challenge after...or during...his tea, anyhow.*

The doors to the grand entrance were open allowing a gentle breeze to permeate the usually stuffy innards of the school. She saw no occupants inside as she approached it, but hadn't expected any. It was only a week after the 2001 term had ended, and most Professors were either on holiday or at their summer homes with family. She hadn't been back in four years.

In a truly nostalgic moment, she turned back towards the main gates in the archway, remembering a much less deserted front lawn on her last day as a student.

*The place was a sea of colour with smatterings of dark red and, of course, the traditional white for such an occasion. Hermione stood with a quiescent Harry and a much-less-so Ron, who had finally been forgiven and had made amends about the devastating row that had caused her so much pain earlier that year. He was currently wrapped around one seventh-year Hufflepuff's pinkie, but that would soon change as he and Harry were off to Auror training.*

*Hermione peered through the crowd of graduates, professors, students, parents, and Ministry officials and located the Headmistress, dressed in slightly more festive tartan robes and the familiar pursed lips as she spoke to her Deputy-Headmaster amidst a gaggle of rambunctious second-years. The Potions master towered over the crowd,*

*extremely noticeable in his slim black robes. She wondered if anyone had dared to compare him with the American vigilante, Batman. Laughing quietly to herself, Head Girl and recipient of Order of Merlin, First Class weaved her way through the rejoicing numbers and found herself in front of said dark knight, barely suppressing a smile.*

*"Good afternoon, Professor," she began.*

*He nodded to her, arms folded as McGonagall turned to address a disgruntled parent. "Miss Granger."*

*She took a moment to take him in: his usually greasy hair looked fine and shone in the mid-afternoon light, and he was wearing his nicer set of robes. The ones he had worn the night of the Halloween ball and had given to her temporarily as a means of warmth. She hadn't spoken to him since the fifteenth of January, their tentative... relationship or whatever one could call it... fading away after the incident with her Epiphonosserum.*

*"I wanted to thank you..."*

*"There is no need for that, Miss Granger." The man spoke quietly, his arms folded and his shoulders hunched.*

*"May I continue, anyway?"*

*He was silent.*

*"I just wanted to thank you for everything that you've done for my friends and I"...he scowled..."over the years. With everything that you were doing for Dumbledore"...another deepening scowl..."it must have been a real drag to put up with our antics. But you did, and I, at least, am thankful for that. But, I am grateful, especially, for everything that you've done for me, this year. And I haven't been exactly... embracing... of the care you've given me, despite what it might've cost you..."*

*His expression softened, then, but he still looked very uncomfortable. The second-years had scurried away when she came striding up (Head Girl had a broom up her you-know-what, according to the twelve-year-olds) and now Minerva was chatting with a witch from the Wizengamot who looked rather like Elton John in all her sparkling glory. As she'd been walking up to Snape, she'd wondered briefly how the woman managed to pull it off...what with the maroon robes that signified her rank.*

*She held out her hand. And very tentatively, cautiously, the Potions Master extended his long-fingered hand, too.*

*This was her chance, so she took it, grabbing his hand and pulling herself toward him. He, startled, let go of her hand and she brought both of hers to curl around his shoulders for a hug.*

*His entire body went rigid, but Hermione was not deterred. She squeezed him lightly, and just as he probably thought the worst was over, she stood up on her tippy toes and pecked him on the cheek...*

*"Oi, Granger!" A familiar voice rose above the crowd. "Stop harassing my Head of House! We've gotta get a move on!"*

*As she backed away, she briefly felt the palms of Snape's hands brush against her ribs, but then he stepped away, a sneer already curling his lip.*

*"Your boyfriend is calling for you," he intoned.*

*What a way to end your school career...by giving the most-feared wizard in Britain a kiss on the cheek. He must've been horrified.*

*Smiling a bit too much, her arms akimbo, Hermione stepped up into the Entrance Hall and made her way down into the dungeons.*

*It hadn't taken her much time to pucker up the nerve, given that she'd only come back from Egypt two weeks ago. Even in Cairo...scratch that, Pondicherry...she'd given some time to the thought.*

*Hadn't her secret passion been Potions since second year, anyway? And now that... that Draco was no longer in her life, she didn't have anyone to run the idea by. She guessed that could be taken either way.*

*Mr. and Mrs. Harry James Potter were living on the opposite side of Ottery St. Catchpole to the Burrow, and George and Angelina had been letting out their apartment above Weasley's Wizard Wheezes to Ron (currently a Quidditch commentator) and his fiancée (Tommie, who ran a cheese shop in Diagon Alley) for the past two years.*

*It was he who had known where to locate Professor Severus Snape, Potions Master, Head of Slytherin House and Deputy-Headmaster at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, over the summers, which Hermione thought was rather odd. They'd never been on particularly friendly terms... ever.*

*But she'd gone to Spinner's End, and the place looked as unlivable as inhumanly possible...the windows were boarded up, and a soggy For Sale By Owner sign was hanging over the chain-link fence that surrounded the pitiful front yard. Not to mention all the overgrowth that seemed to sprout from the bricks and roofing of the disaster that Ron had called a house.*

*So, she was here, walking down to the dungeons, her heeled wizarding boots from Melbourne clicking and echoing off the damp walls of the dungeon hall, hoping that he'd be there. And that he'd speak with her.*

*When she reached the door, she crossed two fingers behind her summery robes and rapped smartly on the oak door of his private office.*

*Someone on the other side cursed, and she heard a chair scrape back as Severus Snape stood abruptly. Papers shuffled, and then she felt the wards lift, a funny warmth blowing toward her as the unwelcoming feeling of the dungeons lifted as well.*

*So that's why it was always so damned scary down here!*

*And then the door swung open so fast that it banged against the inside wall.*

*"For the last time, Minerva, I've told you that I'm not..." The man finally noticed just whom he was yelling at. "...going... to change... my mind..." His voiced petered off and he just stared at her in confusion. "Hullo, Hermione," he exhaled.*

*The sound of her name on his lips was a little too intimate for either person's comfort, but Hermione took it in stride and gave him a wide smile. "Good afternoon, Professor. I was wondering if I could come in?"*

*He stared at her, and then shook his head violently, as if to physically clear it. "If you insist."*

*He pivoted and then strode swiftly to his desk, sitting down, propping his elbows up on an open, dog-eared journal that was self-recording as the seconds ticked by. Underneath the thing she saw a crisp parchment with what looked like the edge of a Wizard Wheezes 'W', but she couldn't be entirely sure. And he waved with an open hand to the rather uncomfortable-looking chair in front of the desk. This brought her attention to the room at large, littered with cardboard boxes, wooden crates, and trunks.*

*"Professor, are you moving out?"*

*"Yes, Miss Granger. I've resigned from my post here to continue my potions business and research from home. I've grown tired of this teaching business."*

"I'm not surprised." She smirked. "But you aren't moving back to that hellhole in Spinner's End, are you?"

"No, I am not moving back to that *hellhole*, Miss Granger. But I'm sure the sole purpose of your little vacation from your *two-year vacation* was not to engage your old Potions master in idle banter. You are well aware what I think about frivolous conversation."

"No, that was not my sole purpose. But neither am I on 'vacation'. I've been back in Britain for two-and-a-half weeks, and I came here to ask you something."

"Could I ever stop you from asking something?" he asked, more so to himself.

"No." Hermione smiled, and Snape scanned her face from some trace of an underhanded motive.

"Ask away, Granger," he stated, apparently satisfied.

"Would you be willing to tutor me in an Apprenticeship?"

"Yes."

"Yes?"

"Did I not just say that?"

"Well, I thought I'd have to try a little harder..."

"You're competent enough, I should think."

Emotions roiled up inside her, and she was fit to burst with excitement. "Oh, I won't let you down, Professor! I've been studying potions since I left school, and Draco and I have met several masters from all over the Eastern Hemisphere! Why, in Kyoto we met Sir Yuki Kosugi, inventor of the Dittany adaptation, and then in Cairo, there was Ismael Hassanein who found the cure for Malaria, and..."

"Miss Granger."

Her jaw snapped shut.

"I was wondering where the know-it-all was." His eyes crinkled in a smile, but he quickly fixed that problem. "Why come to me now? Why not ask any of those ~~wonderful~~ masters across the globe that you speak so familiarly of?"

Hermione was hard pressed for a legitimate answer. She'd wanted to work again...to do something useful and learn more at the same time...and maybe even earn the respect of the man currently seated in front of her. The man whose trust she had lost four years ago. "I want to learn from the best." *There. Flattering and ingenuous.*

He chuckled seeing past her guise. "Yes, Miss Granger. I too wish for a change in scenery. I want to continue my private business away from this place to focus on more useful things. That's why I'm moving to my family property in Ansouis."

"Pardon...? *Provence!*?"

He nodded, folding his hands together.

"So... You're moving to France..."

"Yes, Granger, I'm moving to my grandmother's Provincial cottage near the Luberon Valley. It is a comfortable home...three bedrooms, three baths, complete with a small, publicly farmed olive orchard and a porch swing on the patio. Does that satisfy you? Does that change your plans?"

"Uhm... No! Ansouis sounds lovely! I've only ever been to the Alps and Paris. Oh, this is so exciting, Professor. Thank you for saying yes."

"Certainly Miss Granger," he closed his recording journal and steepled his fingers. "I shall expect you packed and ready by the twenty-fourth of August. Meet me at Heathrow. I'll buy our tickets."

"But surely we don't have to fly..."

"Do you expect my Muggle neighbours to accept the fact that *magically* appeared one day, without moving in?"

"Well, no. I didn't realize it was an entirely Muggle neighbourhood. Does that mean we move in the regular way?"

"No, I've been pushing boxes and boxes through the Floo for days, now. All my things go to France. We will bring some large suitcases to 'cover our tracks,' so to speak, so the good people of Ansouis don't ask questions."

"Yes, of course."

"Do you speak French, Miss Granger?"

"Oh, only a very pitiful amount. I used to study it over the..."

"Well, it would be best to brush up. No one speaks a word of English."

"Brilliant," Hermione sighed. "I'm up for a challenge."

Snape cocked an eyebrow, a trait that Hermione hadn't realized she missed. "And you think working under my supervision won't be challenge enough, Granger?"

"I think I can handle it." Hermione smirked.

"Alright, well." The professor sighed. "This changes my plans, but certainly not negatively. I could use your help when I start up my own potions supplier."

"Oh, thank you so much, Professor. This will be... oh, I'm so excited!" Hermione rose up in her chair and drummed her fingers on the front of his desk.

He just chuckled and stood to show her out. "I will owl you with details. I trust you still live with your parents?"

"Oh, yes, just for this summer until I could find a job."

"Well, you've got one. Goodbye, Miss Granger."

"Thank you, Professor. I was apprehensive... but now I look forward to this year. I can hardly breathe for my excitement!" It was then that she launched herself at him and squeezed him around the neck, again, which threw him off balance and into his door. He gave a muffled 'oof' as his back made contact with the dark oak, and Hermione was glad that he did not stiffen, but rather gently removed her clinging limbs from his person. "Sorry, Professor," she mumbled.

"August twenty-fourth, Miss Granger."

"August twenty-fourth."

Hermione grinned all the way back to the Apparation point.

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**Other Notes:** Feedback and concrit are welcome, as always. Expect the next installment sooner rather than later. Love to all. -CC