Fallout

by linlawless

When Hermione hurts Severus's feelings, he seeks revenge, only to find that things
weren't what they seemed.

A one-shot

Chapter 1 of 1

When Hermione hurts Severus's feelings, he seeks revenge, only to find that things weren't what they seemed.

A/N: This is not my usual fare, but it got stuck in my head and interfered with my ability to concentrate on my other WIPs, so I decided to go ahead and write it. I'm toying with the idea of continuing it or perhaps writing a sequel, eventually, but I think it stands well on its own for now. Reviews are always greatly appreciated.

Note that there's an implied miscarriage (not one of the main characters), so if that bothers you, please don't read.

Characters and concepts belong to JKR.

Hermione sat in an armchair in the living room, feeling an unnatural calm that she knew would dissipate as soon as Severus walked in the door assuming he bothered to come home at all. She thought he probably would. Whatever else he was, he had always seemed to be a creature of habit, and since he had come back here every night for the last two years, he would probably come back tonight, too.

She had finished with everything else she needed to do, and she had tried to convince herself to leave without confronting him. He would certainly know why she had left there was no way to hide what he had done, and he must know that she could never accept it.

Or maybe he didn't. She just didn't know anything anymore. She had thought that they were happy. She had thought that he loved her as much as she had loved him. Apparently, though, she had been wrong. If he had loved her as much as he had seemed to, he would never have hurt her like this.

So she had packed everything that was hers, which hadn't taken much time at all, really, and then had asked Harry and Luna if she could stay with them for a little while, just until she figured out what she was going to do next. To his credit, Harry hadn't gloated at all, although he would have been within his rights to do so, since he had tried to talk her out of marrying Severus in the first place. He had simply told her she could stay as long as she liked and asked her if there was anything else he could do for her. Then he had hugged her for a long time before taking her things with him back to number twelve, Grimmauld Place, where he and Luna had lived since their marriage ten months ago.

The room had grown dark as Hermione waited, but she didn't bother doing anything about it. The darkness suited her mood. She wished she could have just left without a word, but she couldn't bring herself to do it. Her damned curiosity kept her seated in her chair, as the hour grew late and the shadows deepened. She couldn't leave without asking him why. Even if he lied, even if he didn't want to tell her, she deserved to know. She needed to know. So she at least had to ask. She had to try to find out, even if he didn't love her, why he didn't at least respect her enough to tell her he wanted out, instead of going behind her back like this. After everything, she had at least deserved that much, hadn't she?

She knew herself well enough to know that if she didn't at least ask him why, she would never be able to move on. So she sat and waited.

At last, she heard the wards admitting him. Her heart started racing, and she stood and faced the door, not wanting to feel at any more disadvantage than she absolutely had to. When he came into view, he looked around, then stopped abruptly. His eyes locked on her across the room, and he asked coolly, "Hermione, why are you in the dark?"

She didn't answer him. Instead, she asked the only question she needed answered. "Why, Severus? Why would you hurt me like that? What did I ever do to you to deserve so little respect?"

His eyes widened, then narrowed. His voice had an edge of bitter satisfaction when he replied, "Don't play the innocent victim, Hermione, it doesn't suit you. You know exactly what you did."

She was surprised. She had been going over and over it in her mind all day, and she hadn't come up with anything. She said, "All I ever did, Severus, was love you. I thought you loved me, but I realize now that that's impossible, because if you loved me, you would never have hurt me so deeply."

"Love me?" Severus spat. "You don't know the meaning of the word. I *saw* you, Hermione. I saw you all over your ex-boyfriend. You didn't know I was there, obviously, but I saw *everything*."

Ah. That explained everything, Hermione thought with surprising lack of emotion. Except one thing, which sort of didn't matter anymore, anyway, but she wasn't going to let him think that she had cheated first, when she hadn't. "So, the Fidelity Charm was activated by me offering *comfort* to my *friend*, whose wife had just miscarried for the third time in a year? Is that what you're telling me?" He paled suddenly, the smug nastiness wiped away and replaced with a slightly green, nauseated expression. Interpreting his expression, she continued, "I thought not. Not that it matters, anyway, because the Fidelity Charm worked just fine when it let me know about *you* cheating on *me*. I'll be filing the divorce petition first thing in the morning. Do us both a favor and don't contest it."

She took one last look around, making sure she had everything, then started toward the door. He blocked her path, speaking in a rush, "Hermione, wait, don't go! I'm sorry, I didn't mean it, I swear! We can work this out, I know we can. I love you. I didn't even really cheat. I just kissed her, I swear, and then I realized I couldn't go through with it. I should have realized, I should have known you would never cheat on me."

She was pleased to find that, for the first time in years, his obvious remorse had no effect on her. She had locked her heart against him, and now she was too numb to care that he regretted his actions. She said coldly, "Yes, Severus, you should have known that. But the thing is, I don't care if you're sorry, and I don't care if you want to make it up to me, and I don't care what you actually did. It doesn't matter, even a little bit, if you kissed her or fucked her or or went away on *holiday* with her. The fact is, you don't trust me. You never have, and you never will. Even with a damned Fidelity Charm, even after everything we've been through, even after I've defended you defended *us*, time and again you immediately assumed the worst of me. You didn't even allow for the *possibility* that it might not be what you thought that there might be an innocent explanation for what you saw. I can't live like that. I don't *want* to live like that. So, I'm done. I'm leaving, and I'm not coming back. I'm going to get over you, and I'm going to put this whole mess behind me. I'll just chalk it up to learning the hard way that you can't ever change anyone else, no matter how much you love them. And eventually, I'm going to meet someone else, and fall in love again, and I'm going to be *happy*, because I'm never again going to waste time with someone who's too damaged to trust anyone or to recognize a good thing when he finds it. I'm going to find someone who loves me and trusts me and respects me enough that if he found me naked in bed with three other men, he would immediately assume there was an innocent explanation for it, Fidelity Charm or no Fidelity Charm. And you, Severus, can just go ahead and be miserable and alone and paranoid. Just don't kid yourself that you didn't bring this on yourself. Now, get out of my way."

Long after Hermione left, Severus stared at the doorway, willing her to come back, knowing that she wouldn't. He had pushed her too far this time. All because he had been too insecure to remember that she had chosen him, time and again, in the face of all sorts of opposition from her friends, her family, and even complete strangers. All because he had been so upset, seeing her hugging Weasley, that he hadn't even noticed that the Fidelity Charm hadn't been activated by what she was doing.

No, he had reverted to the nasty, heartless git he had been before he had fallen in love with her. He had thought of the most efficient way to hurt her as deeply as he hurt, and he had set about to do it. He had gone to the Hog's Head, had a few drinks, then propositioned the first reasonably attractive woman he saw, and taken her to one of the upstairs rooms. It was only when he had been kissing her for several minutes that the wrongness of it all began to penetrate the haze of hurt and anger and drink.

The woman, whose name he had already forgotten, felt all wrong in his arms. She was too tall, and too thin, and she didn't kiss right. She just didn't fit at all. He had torn himself away from the woman, leaving without a word, and spent the next several hours walking around Hogsmeade, trying to decide what to do about his marriage. He loved Hermione, but could he stay with a woman who cheated on him? Who flaunted it in a public place?

Of course, he should have realized, based on where he saw her the lobby of St. Mungo's that there might be another reason for her to be hugging Weasley so tightly. He had known that Weasley's wife had suffered more than one miscarriage recently it should have occurred to him that Hermione would be comforting her friend in the event of another one.

But it hadn't, because he had never quite managed to believe that she really loved him. He had always, deep down, thought that she would eventually realize that she had thrown her life away on a man who didn't deserve anyone as brilliant and beautiful and powerful as her. He was only too ready to assume, when he saw her hugging someone else, that she had come to her senses at last.

And in assuming that, he had lashed out in the most childish, hurtful way he could possibly have dreamt up. He had gone straight for the jugular.

Only to discover he had slit his own throat ripped out his own heart in the process.

She was right. He couldn't blame this on anyone but himself. He had single-handedly, in the space of a single kiss, brought about what he had always feared the most.

She had left him.

And she wasn't coming back.

Unless ...