

Deal With The Devil

by chivalric

Snape makes a deal...

One-shot story

Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: This story features Hades, the Greek god of the Underworld, and is therefore widely AU. It's a bitter story, but I couldn't get it out of my head.

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Emotionless, Severus Snape looked at the broken body of Hermione Granger. She was still bleeding, lying in the soft green grass, and her ashen, twisted face showed the pain she had suffered when death had taken her. Had taken her laughter, her breath, her warm touch; had taken her away from him.

He had been only a little bit late whilst she had waited for him on their clearing she had found the previous year. It was a small place, surrounded by ancient trees in the middle of the Forbidden Forest. Until today, they had met here regularly, sometimes to make love, sometimes to talk, sometimes to just hold each other. Their love was strong and pure, had taken them both by surprise, and they cherished it in every moment they were awake and even in their dreams.

He would have been here earlier, but Albus had wanted a favour, a small thing concerning a potion he needed, and Severus Snape had considered it only fair to do what he had been asked. It was rare nowadays that the Headmaster came down to the dungeons. The Dark Lord was dead, Snape's name cleared, and the world a better place to live in once more. No need anymore for spy-work, but now and then Albus needed a potion only his Potions master could brew. Dumbledore had looked at him with a twinkle in his eyes, and Severus had always found it hard to withstand a simple plea. And so he had brewed the requested potion for the Headmaster, who was not only his employer but his friend as well, although Snape knew that his love was already waiting for him under the trees. *She will have a book, a blanket, and a picnic basket*, he knew and calmed down a bit whilst he added the ingredients to his cauldron. *She will wait for me, and we have until sunset*. He needn't to worry, he knew it, but then it was a lot better to be with her than with his cauldrons.

He hurried with the potion, hurried on the way out of Hogwarts, practically ran towards the Forbidden Forest, and there was a smile on his face as she had promised to wear the green dress, buttoned all the way from the neckline down to the hem, the dress he loved to see on her most.

He knew something was wrong when she didn't get up to greet him, when she remained lying on the colourful plaid she had brought, and then he had seen the blood trickle from the corner of her mouth.

The angle of her body, of her legs and her back, was just dreadfully wrong.

Someone had attacked her. Someone had found her, possibly by coincidence, and had decided that the world would be better off without her. There were still a few Death Eaters at large this one, the one who had found her, had cast a Crucio first and had killed her afterwards.

Had Snape been just half an hour earlier, he would have heard her screaming in agony.

Severus Snape stared at the corpse of the woman he had loved, still loved, and couldn't bear it. Life without her was meaningless; to live without her love would break him. He had spent so many years alone, hated by everyone, trapped between Dark and Light, crushed between two most demanding masters who both had used him mercilessly and without second thoughts about his wishes or his well-being. That she had wanted him of all men available had been nothing less but a miracle for him, and at first he had refused to believe that an angel like her could love a monster like him.

But she had been patient and with gentle tactics had persuaded him to give in to her courting. When he had finally surrendered, she had led him to this clearing, had dropped her robes and her shyness, and had seduced him on the very spot where she now lay dead.

His eyes were big, his teeth clenched, his hands balled to fists. Tears were streaming down his face, unnoticed, unimportant.

The Potions master's heart broke just like that at her sight, and he dropped to his knees. Madness lured, attacked, and poured silently into his soul.

He got up and drew his wand. What was the use of having been a Death Eater for most of his adult life, what for had he studied the Dark Arts since he'd been a teenager if not to find a way out of this nightmare? If not to find a way to get her back?

The wind played with his robes and his long, black hair whilst he turned his back to his dead love and started to sing an enchantment in low, bitter tones. Dreadful was the sound of his voice, dangerous, and powerful. The darkest magic rose from the ground, burned the sweet grass and left a complicated pattern to the Potions master's feet. Like snakes, faint, pale, shadowy snakes, the spell worked its way through the mild summer air whilst the sun painted roses on Hermione's snow white cheeks, pretending there was a beating heart that could still put a flush on her pallid skin.

The light grew darker with every note Snape sang, and his voice became hoarse soon. The magic had reached his hands and was entwined in his fingers. The wind was now cold, and the sun was covered by looming clouds. Thunder roared in the distance, and still the Potions master didn't stop forcing the words out of his throat. Hogwarts, just visible against the dark sky, vanished. The trees and their leaves turned grey and dead, the grass broke under Snape's heavy boots. The insects which had been humming only moments ago in the warm September air stopped beating their tiny wings and crashed to the ground, drawing their last breath. All sound was gone, all colour, all life. Shadows crept in; Hermione's body was not to be seen anymore, and Snape was grateful for it.

Lightning hit him, and he struggled, fell to his knees. His palms, outstretched to soften his fall, were ripped open by razor sharp rocks. Blood trickled, soaked the ground, left pools between the stones and Snape stopped singing. The door had finally opened, the door to the Underworld, the door he had to pass in order to find the one being who could give him back his one and only love.

He staggered to his feet and deliberately started to walk on. He didn't care or maybe didn't even notice that the rocks cut his boots to pieces and his feet were leaving bloody footprints on the path down into the Underworld. His head was filled with darkness and grief, his angrily beating heart ached, he had stopped thinking and his eyes were only fixed at the huge gate in front of him.

There the hellhound sat with his three ugly heads and awaited him, ready to tear him to pieces.

Snape just looked at the furry, dirt-covered animal whose job it was to protect the entrance of his master's mansion. "Cerberus," Snape said absently and flicked the massive creature a Knut. Coincidentally, it had been in the pocket of his robes, and he didn't spare a second look to make sure the hellhound really backed away into the darkness again, satisfied that this human man knew the password his name and had paid the requested obulus.

The way down to Hades's residence was steep and foggy. Not much was to be seen, but a lot to be heard. Screams in the dim light, laughter here and there, and occasionally, one could perceive a tear drop onto the stones.

Snape, though, just walked on. He had dropped his robes as it was warm down here; he had discarded his wand as he knew he couldn't use it against the Lord of this realm anyway. His eyes were fixed on the light ahead, where he was certain Hades would sit on his throne, awaiting him. He walked on steadily, he walked on silently, and he didn't turn once. In his head was only one picture: the small line of blood that had trickled out of Hermione's beautiful mouth.

The Lord of the Underworld was curious, which didn't happen that often. Seldom a human found his way down here, and for some peculiar reason it was always a male. Maybe their grief is bigger than the grief of a woman, Hades mused. A female never makes the effort to come to me; now is that a weakness in the male or a strength? Or is it coincidence?

Hades had watched this man perform the ritual to cross the border, had seen how he had made his way down here and how unimpressed this man had been by his pet, Cerberus. "So you're arrogant then, human," Hades boomed across the great hall and was satisfied to see the man, who had just stepped in, flinch.

Once this man had been proud; once he had held his head high. He had been a man who had snarled at other humans, had used his intelligence and sarcasm to make them crawl in the dust before him. Once he had been strong.

Not anymore. He was just a human, broken by the loss of a loved one. "Kneel before me, worm," Hades purred tenderly, and the man dropped before him, his head hanging low, his long black hair brushing the stones where others had stood before the Lord of the Underworld.

Hades chuckled. His long, red horns quivered as amusement shook him, and his eyes gleamed. "A glass," he ordered, and a shadow rushed forward, a glass made of diamonds held firm in its see-through hands. Bowing deeply, the shadow lifted the glass, filled to the rim with a pale liquid.

Hades smacked his full lips and took the glass, breathing the fragrance in deeply, then took a tentative sip. "Aaaaah," he hummed, highly satisfied with the taste. "Do you know what this is, human?"

The man with the pallid face lifted his head. His eyes, black as the night, were empty but of lingering tears. He shook his head at Hades's question.

Hades, shifting his hips on his throne made out of dreams and hopes and fear, smiled. "This here is wine, made of the tears of a child, shed at his mother's grave," he said mildly. "He cried so bitterly and wanted his mama back, but of course, a few tears won't pay the price for a soul. You do understand that, worm, don't you?"

The man nodded once. He was still on his knees, his arms clutched around his waist as if the gesture could stop him from shivering. It couldn't.

"It's not that bad down here, you know." Getting up from his throne, Hades came to the little human who was so pitiful in his loss. "Why do you want to take someone away from here? It's warm, the company is nice, and there's no fear of death anymore." Casually, he reached down and buried a long nailed hand in the man's dark mane, snatched him up and shook him like a rag doll. Then he pulled him close, like a lover would pull his beloved close. The man smelled of grass and blood, of tears and pain. He smelled scared, lonely and broken. Hades licked his lips he liked those smells.

One nail caressed the man's cheek, so pale and so tender. Blood welled up, but the man didn't quiver. He just stared into Hades's dark red irises. The human's nostrils flared, his pulse hammered, and he couldn't suppress the shiver, but apart from that, the man didn't move, and he didn't back off, either.

Hades released his grip. The man fell to his feet, but didn't fall down on his knees again. "Arrogance," Hades wondered. "Now that is something I rarely see down here. Most wail and cry and beg and give me a headache with their howling. You are different; why are you different?"

"I want her back," the man said, silently, with an angry note in his voice. "I will pay your price, but I want her back. Alive. The way she was, with all her memories, all her emotions, all her hopes, and with her love for me."

Hades, who had studied his nails, shot the man a delighted look. "She loves you?" he asked.

"Yes," the man answered. "She does."

"And you love her, too?" Hades could barely keep the smile from his lips.

Silence. Then the man said, "Yes," as if this confession meant nothing to him. But Hades knew better. He had dealt with humans for an eternity, and they couldn't lie to him.

"Oh, ho, ho," Hades laughed, the sound filling the hall. The shadows went back into the darkness for a bit. When Hades laughed, it was a bitter and dangerous sound. "You love her? You? A man who only tried to love once and with your awful love drove the girl in question not only into someone else's arms but caused her death as well? You dare to say you love, although you don't even know what love is?" Hades fixed his gleaming eyes on the human's face and whispered, "You would have crushed this one here, sooner or later; you would have destroyed her. But it doesn't matter because you were late, she is dead now! It is your fault she is here!"

The human closed his eyes in despair. Yes, Hades knew how to deal with humans. They always fell for his lies.

But then, this one didn't. Opening his eyes again, the man just stood and refused to lower his head, his eyes now piercing into the eyes of Hades. "I love her," he said, his voice as calm as if talking about daisies. "I want her back. Name your price."

Hades had to admit to himself that he was impressed. Waving a hand, he summoned one of the shadows. It was of medium height and not as faint as most of the other shadows it had died only recently. It had bushy hair, and it was crying silent tears. "Tell him what you think of him, dear," Hades told the shadow, and it obeyed.

"You killed me, Severus," it whispered, and Hades saw that the words stabbed the human man right into his heart. "I waited. They found me, they tortured me, they killed me. I waited for you, I cried for you, I screamed for you; but you didn't come. You killed me and still you dare to call this love?" Turning, the shadow fled into Hades safe embrace.

The sweet smile in Hades's face ensured the shadow that she had done well. But the man he just shook his head again. His voice was strained with pain, but he said, "She is right, of course; but that's not her. She would never blame me for her death. She loves me."

Hades pushed the shadow away, threw his arms up and wrapped his black fingers round his horns. Solemnly, he shook his head. "You are hard to deal with, little worm. Does she know you love her?" Curiously, he looked at the man, whose face showed nothing but his immense pain. Yes, this one might be worth a bargain, Hades thought and smiled, revealing his pointy teeth. Reaching out, he wrapped his hand round the man's throat and strangled him, just for the fun of it. Only moments before the man would have suffocated, he released him, satisfied that this brought the human to his knees again. Hades liked it when humans knelt in front of him it was their only proper place, after all. "Does she? Does she know?" he pressed, and the man nodded, one hand wrapped round his bruised neck.

"She... just needs to look in my face," he croaked. "She can read me like an open book. She knows she's everything to me." Fighting for balance, the man made it back onto his feet. "Give her back to me," he demanded hoarsely. "I won't leave, otherwise."

"Ah," barked Hades and felt annoyance creeping up his spine. Playing with this one wasn't fun as he refused to quiver and to squirm. "I could take your eyesight," he threatened in a friendly manner. "Or both your hands. Or your magic. I could take your life for hers what do you say to that, human?"

"Whatever," the man answered, sounding slightly bored.

"To hell with you!" Hades screamed. "You are not even properly scared of me take her then, and leave. Don't come back, you are ruining my day!" Waving a hand, he called in the fog, and the man not only fell to his knees this time but was flattened down to his stomach, face on the stones, arms spread wide as if trying to prevent himself from getting pulled away.

But it was only the fog that surrounded him: thick, grey, wet fog, imperturbable like a duvet and bone-crushingly heavy. Hades vanished in this fog, so did his throne and the shadows around him. The last thing to be seen was the glittering bottle before the rocks started falling, falling down on the man, burying him.

And he screamed.

Something had happened, but Hermione couldn't recall what it was. She was confused, her whole body ached, her head was in agony, and when she finally managed to open her eyes, she was shocked at the sight around her.

The clearing, their clearing, hers and Severus's, was dead. Every tree that surrounded the small place had lost its leaves, and the bark had fallen to the ground in messy heaps. The grass was brown, the flowers that had blossomed when she had arrived not that long ago lay trampled to the ground. No bird was singing, no squirrel was playing in the branches. Not even the insects were humming a closer look revealed to Hermione that there were the tiny corpses of butterflies, bumble bees, mosquitoes sprinkled all across the dry meadow.

Stricken with fear Hermione got up, wincing at the pain that shot up her legs. She licked her lips and tasted blood; she looked down her dress and saw that it was torn to pieces; she could locate a button or two lying between a dead bird and a bit of oak bark. Shuddering, she wrapped her arms round her shivering body: what had happened?

Step by step she made her way out of the Forbidden Forest and wandered slowly back up to the school, feeling a little bit mad. It was late afternoon, the sun was low over the trees; she felt as if she had been gone for hours, for days, for a lifetime. What if no one is up there? she suddenly thought, icy fear running up her spine. What if I am the only one left, what if... Severus!

She started running. Something had happened. She had waited for Severus, they had wanted to meet, and then... then... The rest was blurry, and thinking about it ripped her head to pieces. The wind blew her hair all over the place, and finally she saw the big gates, Hogwarts' big gates, and there were some students as well, looking at her with big, shocked eyes. She ignored them she needed to find Severus, maybe he could explain to her...

Stopping dead in her tracks, panting and gasping for air, she suddenly knew that she wouldn't find him. Something terrible had happened whilst she had been waiting for him, and now he was gone, dead, maybe he had never existed... Tears stung in Hermione's eyes, but she refused to let them flow. It had taken her so long to persuade him to give her a chance, to make him understand that he could love, that she wanted him to love, to love her. What if... what if someone else was Potions master here at Hogwarts, what if no one knew him anymore, what if someone would point out his grave to her... "Stop wailing!" she hissed. "Go and check it out!"

Storming past the students, she headed down the staircases, towards the dungeons. There in the classrooms she peeked in, but they were all empty there was the store room, empty as well, there was the door to his private quarters. It looked as it had always looked, and hope fluttered up inside her. She muttered the password, wanted to enter, and bumped hard at the still closed door. It hadn't opened; the wards held.

Surprised and frightened, she said the password again, loud and clear. She was one of only three people who knew it Severus himself, naturally, and Albus being the other two and he had given it to her the day she had taken him out to the clearing for the first time. Ever since, his door had been open for her, and hers for him. That it wasn't now scared her, and she started banging on the door, shouted his name and totally ignored the fact that a few curious students popped their heads round the corner to see what the turmoil was all about.

"What!" The harsh voice washed over her like icy water; at the same time the door was pulled open so suddenly that Hermione nearly lost balance and would have landed on the floor hadn't Severus caught her by the shoulders. "Detention is looming over your head if you don't leave the dungeons immediately," the Potions master bellowed towards the two students who watched their two teachers in awe. Then he grabbed Hermione's wrist and pulled her inside his rooms. The students fled.

"Severus!" Hermione breathed, massively relieved to see him, to hear his voice, to feel his strong hand on her clammy skin. He was as tall as ever, dressed in black as usual, only his hair was down instead of bound near the neck and his eyes...

...his eyes were cold and distant, glittered dangerously, and he looked at her as if she were a small, disgusting, slimy little insect. His jaws were clenched with annoyance at her sight, and his hand was still round her wrist. "You are hurting me, Severus," Hermione whispered whilst dread was building up inside her once more.

He snatched his hand away as if she had burned him. "What was that all about, woman," he hissed but kept the door open. "I utterly dislike being disturbed whilst I work do you still not know that?" Towering above her, he was more fearsome than she had ever seen him, even when she had been his student. "You should be grateful that I was able to save your life; no reason to bother me afterwards, though."

Her mouth opened, but she didn't know what to say. Realising that she must look like a fish on dry land, she finally managed to ask the question that bothered her most. "What happened to you, Severus? Why have you changed, why you are so... awful to me?"

He reached out and placed his pale hand on her chest. She stood with her back to the torch-lit corridor, and he pushed once. She stumbled, tripped, and landed hard on the cold stones outside his rooms. "I realised only recently that you are not worth the effort," he sneered. "You are boring, not massively beautiful, you have the most annoying habits, and I can't stand your presence anymore. Don't ever come down here again."

Then he slammed the door shut.

Hermione, sitting on the dungeon's stony floor, felt her heart break and started to cry.

"The new bottle, little one," called Hades, and the smallest of his shadows obeyed. The ghost of a child skittered away only to return moments later with a tray, a bottle, and a glass. The bottle was crystal clear; the child-shadow lifted it up, tipped it, and poured the liquid into the waiting goblet. It was black like midnight, that liquid.

Hades took the goblet and licked its rim in anticipation of the content. He breathed in the rich fragrance, he admired the perfect colour of this very special wine, he could even feel the gentle warmth through the walls of the glass. Finally, he took a sip, and an ecstatic shudder ran through his massive body. "Aaaahhh!" the Lord of the Underworld moaned and treated himself to a second sip and a third one, unable to resist this delicate, wonderful, entrancing taste. "Ah, I knew it, I knew this would taste better than anything else I had in the last five hundred years. Pure love, pure, heartbreaking love from a man who hadn't loved like this before, who didn't even know what love was before he met this woman." A bright smile crossed Hades's face; his red pupils shone in the half darkness of his realm. "A reasonable price for giving her back to him, don't you all think so?" he asked in mock earnest, knowing that his shadows would never dare to answer. "Pity, though, that he isn't able to cherish neither her life, nor her memories, her hopes, or her love for him, anymore."