The True-Love Spell

by debjunk

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her... and it's not Ron!

One

Chapter 1 of 2

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"Severus!"

Severus Snape paused from his classic billowing-down-the-hall and turned to see Hermione Granger making her way toward him rapidly.

"Oh, I'm glad I caught up to you," Hermione gushed. "I wanted to discuss Hogsmeade weekend. As we are both chaperoning, I was wondering if you'd like to join me for lunch on Saturday."

Severus arched an eyebrow. "Lunch?"

Hermione nodded.

Severus mulled it over. On a positive note, he could spend some extra time with Hermione, whom he'd come to care for deeply. However, on a negative note, he might give himself away to her. He knew their relationship was just one of friendship. Hermione and Ronald Weasley were very close, and Severus suspected they were more than just friends. In any case, Severus knew Hermione didn't see him as more than a friend. His greatest fear was that she would find out his feelings and remove herself from his presence entirely.

"I'm rather busy tomorrow, but..."

"Oi, Hermione, there you are."

Weasley suddenly stood panting next to Hermione and Severus. Hermione turned to him and frowned, which made Severus smile inwardly.

"Yes, Ron, I work here at Hogwarts. Your best bet for finding me would be to search for me in the halls of my workplace."

Weasley seemed oblivious to her sarcasm. "I brought something for you." He stretched forth his hand and held out a small box to her. "It's a present."

"Oh, Ron, that's very thoughtful of you," Hermione answered, her annoyed tone easing up some.

Weasley grinned wildly. "You have to open it now."

"Oh, ok. Well, let's go back to my room."

Weasley glanced towards Severus. "No, no. Open it here. I want to see your reaction to it."

Severus rolled his eyes.

"Well, ok. If you insist." Hermione lifted the lid on the small box and a puff of smoke shot straight into her face.

She scowled. "Ron, what..."

Before she could say another word, Hermione Granger fell to the floor, unconscious.

In an instant, Severus was kneeling at her side. "You buffoon," he bellowed. "What did you do to her?"

"Oh, nothing I can't fix," Weasley said with a smug smile. "It's a new creation of my brothers'--makes the recipient pass out until their true love kisses them."

Severus frowned as Weasley knelt on the other side of Hermione and placed a passionate kiss on her lips. He pulled back and studied her face. Nothing happened. Hermione lay peacefully unconscious on the floor, her breathing smooth and even.

"Hermione?" Weasley said. "Oi, you can quit the joking and wake up now." He shook her, but Hermione did not come out of her spell-induced sleep.

"Weasley, just what is this spell supposed to do?"

Weasley was starting to look nervous now. "She's supposed to wake up, but she's not."

"Why is she not waking up?" Severus asked through gritted teeth.

"I... I don't know. I kissed her. She should be awake by now!"

Severus reached over and pulled Weasley over Hermione until their noses were almost touching.

"Did it ever occur to you that perhaps she doesn't love you?"

"Well, no, that never crossed my mind."

Severus pushed the dunderhead away, which made Weasley fall backwards onto the ground. Ignoring the fool, Severus rose, scooped Hermione up in his arms, and proceeded down the hallway.

"Hey!" Weasley called after him. "Where do you think you're going with her?"

"She needs medical attention. Perhaps Poppy can fix your foolish mistake." And with that, Severus Snape disappeared from Ronald Weasley's view and rushed the woman he 'cared for deeply' to the infirmary.

Poppy raised her head away from Hermione. She'd been examining her for some time now--long enough for Weasley to have made his way to the infirmary also. Severus and he stood at the foot of the bed, awaiting Poppy's diagnosis.

"I'm sorry, I have no idea what to do for her. I'd need more information on the spell first."

"I sent my Patronus to George before I came down here. He should be here soon," Ron offered.

Severus glared at him and moved to the side of the bed farthest from the younger man. He was sorely tempted to strangle the boy, but he pushed the urge away against his better judgment.

At that moment, George Weasley entered the infirmary.

"Ron, what's going on?"

"George, your True Love spell doesn't work. Hermione's not waking up. Wake her up, will you?"

George's eyes grew wide as he approached the small group surrounding Hermione's bed. "You took the spell box, when I specifically told you we were still working on it?"

"Yeah, of course. I knew she'd wake up for me, but you did something wrong. She's still asleep."

George pursed his lips. "Nothing's wrong with the spell. The reason we haven't released this yet, and probably won't, is because the variables are too great. If the person who has been spelled isn't in love with the person who sets the spell, then this happens." He motioned to Hermione's still form.

"Wait," Weasley said as he glanced with concern to Hermione. "You mean she doesn't love me?"

"Evidently not," George said. "Or she'd be awake by now."

"But... she loves me."

"I believe what your brother is trying to tell you, you miserable excuse for an adult, is that she *doesn't* love you," Severus ground out. "If she did, she wouldn't be in this predicament."

Turning to George, Severus continued. "What do we do to awaken her, then?"

George cringed. "Find the person she loves and have him kiss her."

"But if she doesn't love me, who does she love?" Wesley asked dubiously.

"That's what we'll have to find out," Poppy commented softly. "What if she doesn't love anybody?" she mused.

George shook his head. "If she didn't love someone, she wouldn't have been placed under the sleeping spell. She'd have just been cheesed off with Ron."

"We'll need to consult her friends and acquaintances," Severus instructed. "Perhaps she's spoken of someone she loves to one of them."

A deflated Wesley turned to leave. "I'll get Harry. He's probably the one she loves."

"Mr. Weasley, I believe Potter is married," Severus drawled.

Wesley shrugged. "It doesn't matter. She's always loved him."

"I highly doubt that Professor Granger would be in love with an unattainable man. Whether she had feelings for him before is of little importance. She is too intelligent to let herself be involved with a married man."

With that, Severus turned and stalked out of the room. He needed some peace and Weasley-free quiet. He had some serious thinking to do.

Severus snuck into the infirmary later that night, careful not let Poppy hear him When there were overnight guests in the infirmary, Poppy slept in her office and was known for her ability to hear a pin drop from across the room. However, Severus was a spy, and stealth was his friend. He was at Hermione's bedside in seconds, not a sound having given him away.

He looked down at Hermione. Her face was so peaceful. He wondered who she was dreaming about. George had explained to Poppy that the deep sleep that was caused by the spell would induce dreams of Hermione's beloved. Happy dreams. Dreams where she and this mystery man lived happily ever after. Dreams where a man like Severus Snape would never be welcome.

Without thinking, Severus grasped Hermione's hand. Despite his knowing that he was not the man she dreamed of, he couldn't help himself. Seeing her lying there looking so vulnerable made his heart ache.

He frowned. He'd taken careful steps to assure that his heart never ached for anyone. When Lily abandoned their friendship, she'd taken his heart with her, and when he finally had healed enough to feel its return, he'd sealed it against future pain by developing the hard exterior for which he was so well-known.

And yet... here he was... holding a woman's hand and wishing she were his.

I am a fool.

He pulled the chair up next to the bed and sat down quietly, nonetheless, never giving up the hand he'd been caressing.

The circus began the next day. Potter was dragged in by Weasley and made to kiss Hermione. To everyone's relief, she didn't awaken.

Luna Lovegood was then dragged in, not to kiss, but to tell.

"I don't know," she said as she gazed dreamily down at Hermione. "She mentioned that she was not feeling the same about Ron, but she never said she was in love with someone else."

Ginny Potter had even fewer ideas on the matter.

"I thought she loved Ron," she said as she shrugged.

Neville Longbottom was then produced.

"You want me to what? NO!" he cried. "I don't love her! She's my friend, but..."

He was forced to kiss her anyway, to no avail.

"Who else?" Weasley demanded to Potter, who sat across from him on Hermione's other side.

Severus, who had been standing off in the corner the whole time, rolled his eyes. "Perhaps you should put a sign in Hogsmeade for available men to come kiss the sleeping witch."

"That's not a bad idea," Weasley muttered.

Severus took that moment to stalk out, billowing furiously as he went.

Later that day Flitwick and Hagrid had their turns, but Hermione remained asleep. No one even thought to ask Snape to kiss Hermione.

Before long, acquaintances from the Ministry were filing in, kissing and leaving, each wishing she had awakened for them.

Severus grit his teeth for an hour straight. When Mundungus Fletcher came in and puckered up, he lost his cool.

"This is an outrage! Do you think Professor Granger wants all these men pawing at her? Get out of here, all of you, and leave her alone!"

"But we have to find..." Weasley began.

Severus' glare shut him up.

"WE have to find nothing. You have to go home, lick your wounds, and stop sulking. Use logic and think of whom you've seen her with recently."

"I haven't seen her with anyone!"

Severus wheeled around on Potter. "And you! Some friend you are, letting people you **know** she would not be interested in kiss her like that. There will be no more parading of suitors! Figure out the one person she'd likely fall in love with and bring him here. No one else."

"Well, Snape, if you're so smart," Potter burst in, "why don't you figure out who she's in love with? She spends a lot of time with you. Has she said she's in love with anyone lately?"

"I was under the same impression as the witless wonder over there--that she was in love with him!"

"But she's not. Has she talked about other men in passing with you?"

"No, she hasn't," Severus said in defeat.

"So, for all your bellowing, you're not any better help than anyone else, then, right?"

Severus snarled. "Get out..." he said quietly. "Get out now, before I hex you both so far that it will take you a year to Apparate back here."

"Oi, Snape, calm down. We're all just trying to help her," Weasley said in a condescending tone.

"Yes, helping to kill her. You're the one who put her in this predicament. Now get out."

Weasley stalked out, but Potter glared at Severus. He looked to Hermione with concern. Finally making a decision, he shook his head, turned, and left. Severus glared after him until the door closed behind them. Once Potter and Weasley were gone, though, his tense body deflated. He turned to Hermione and went to her side. Falling into the chair beside her, he gave her a plaintive look.

"I'm sorry. They were trying to help, but they were being fools. I hope you weren't offended by all those men kissing you."

He leaned forward and sighed. "I wish there were more I could do for you," he murmured in a half whisper.

A week passed. Hermione's condition never changed. Several more men were brought in, but none were the right man. Severus began to believe that the man Hermione loved must be someone obscure. He suggested Viktor Krum. Two days later, Viktor stooped low and placed a kiss on Hermione's lips. He waited.

"Too bad," Viktor muttered after a few minutes. "I would have been honored had it been me who you loved, Hermioniny."

Severus stalked out of the room, fuming. Was everyone in love with this woman? He'd spent hours trying to figure out who she could love back, going over every conversation they'd ever had in his mind. Unfortunately, anyone she'd ever mentioned had already been paraded in front of her. If it wasn't any of those men, then who could it be?

Severus stopped and, making sure no one was about, leaned in defeat against the wall. All that thinking of Hermione had just made him realize he loved her. He, Severus Snape, loved Hermione Granger. And with the realization of love came also the thought that although he would not be the one to win her, he wished they would find the one she loved, because he could no longer stand to see her lying on the infirmary bed, motionless.

Cursing to himself, he spun around and returned to the infirmary. He entered and was satisfied to find that Hermione's visitors had left. She lay alone in the corner of the infirmary, where she would be disturbed the least.

He sunk into the chair next to her bed. His shoulders slumped as he gazed at her.

"I wish I could awaken you, Hermione. I wish I were the one you were dreaming about."

A voice came from behind him. "Severus, are you really as dense as Mr. Potter and Mr. Weasley?"

Severus wheeled around in his seat and saw the Headmistress standing behind him. Evidently she'd had some lessons in stealth also, as he hadn't heard her approach.

"Minerva, let me be."

"Severus, the answer is as plain as the nose on your face."

Severus grimaced at her. "The answer has eluded everyone for over a week."

Minerva moved closer and placed a hand on his shoulder. "You really don't see it, do you?"

"See what?" Severus asked grouchily.

"Who Hermione is in love with."

Severus rose and began to pace. "If I knew that, don't you think he'd be here by now? Don't you think she'd be awake and embracing the man she loves? What do you take me for?"

Minerva went over to him again and held his shoulders to stop his pacing. "I take you for a man who is afraid to let his feelings be known. Don't you see, Severus? It's you. She loves you!"

"Bollocks!"

"It's true. Who does she spend all her time with?"

"Weasley."

Minerva shook her head and pursed her lips. "You are always so difficult! No, she spends all her time with you! You are the one she seeks out any time of the day. If I want to find one of you, I look where I know the other will be. Do you not find it strange that she spends so much time with you? Can you not see that you are the one she loves?"

Severus grit his teeth together. "If you believe this, why didn't you say anything this last week?" he raged.

Minerva released him and crossed her arms in front of her in annoyance. "I hoped that you would figure it out yourself, but you are so blind that you can't seem to realize the truth when it's staring you in the face!" She pointed at Hermione and frowned. "You say you wish she were dreaming of you. Well, I'm willing to bet that she is. Why haven't you kissed her yet? Everyone else in the castle has!"

"I... she... no. No. I am not who she is dreaming of. I am not the one she loves."

"You're sure of that?"

Severus hesitated. He glanced at Hermione. She had a peaceful smile on her face. He looked to Minerva. She nodded at him.

"It can't be..."

"Yes, it can, Severus."

"No, she has so many others to choose from."

"And they have all been rejected. Who else would you have her kiss? You have done nothing but grouse about the men who were coming in here before." Minerva took a step closer. "It's you. You are the one who is keeping her in that bed. Kiss her already and awaken her so you can be together."

"What if she doesn't wake up?" Severus said in defeat.

Minerva's hand came up to his arm again, and she shook him lightly. "She *will*."

Her hand stayed on his arm for a few more seconds before she withdrew it. "I'll just leave you two alone. I expect to see Professor Granger up and about within the hour."

Severus gave a guttural laugh. "You have too much faith in me, Minerva."

"Call it making up for past errors," she said over her shoulder as she left the room.

Severus watched her go and then moved back to Hermione, staring down at her. Could she possibly be dreaming of him? Would his kiss be the one to awaken her, proving that they both felt the same towards each other? He leaned low, his breath becoming shallow as trepidation filled him. He could feel her warmth, he was so close to her. Just a centimeter or two more and his lips would be touching hers. It was the one thing he had craved to do for months now, and he was so close to doing it.

"You are so beautiful," he said gruffly. He moved a hairsbreadth closer. Anticipation filled him.

His gaze moved up to her closed eyes. Would she even feel his kiss? Would she know it was him? Would she be repulsed?

He frowned and straightened. "If it's not me, I will be taking advantage of you. I cannot do that."

He wheeled around and fled the room, not looking back.

A/N: Hello, everybody. This one will be complete in two chapters. I hope you enjoyed the first!

Many thanks to slytherinlaurel for the great beta work.

Two

Chapter 2 of 2

Only one person can awaken Hermione from the spell that Ron has placed upon her... and it's not Ron!

Chapter 2

Severus' footsteps got heavier and heavier the farther from the infirmary he went. Before he'd gotten to the end of the hall, it was as if he couldn't lift his legs anymore. He cringed to himself. The voice of Harry Potter reverberated in his mind.

Coward!

He stopped and inhaled deeply. He'd run... in fear.

I am being selfish.... Afraid that she will not awaken, and I will have to deal with the truth finally: that she couldn't possibly care for me.

He turned with a determined look on his face. He needed to try and break the spell. What if he *was* the only person who could break it? What disservice was he doing to Hermione by keeping her bound indefinitely while he vacillated about whether to kiss her or not?

Moving became easier once he'd made his decision. He soon found himself by her bedside once again. Sitting at the edge of her bed, he bent low. His eyes studied her face.

"Please let it be me," he whispered.

His lips touched hers in a tender kiss. He pulled back and held his breath as he waited. She didn't move. For what seemed an eternity, he watched her. Nothing.... It hadn't worked. In anguish, he buried his head in her chest.

"You were wrong, you old bat. So wrong," he muttered to an absent Minerva.

A weak voice came to him as fingers entwined in his hair. "Severus, did you just call me an old bat?"

Severus' head snapped up. Hermione was looking at him... speaking to him.... She was awake, and he had awakened her.

"Hermione," he whispered.

Hermione's eyebrows knit together. "Why am I in the infirmary? Was it all a dream?" Reality must have hit her because she froze, realizing where her hand was. Pulling it from Severus' hair, she blushed and looked away.

He grasped her hand and pulled it closer to him, making her look at him oddly.

"What do you remember?" he asked her.

She looked away again, her eyebrows knit in concentration as she thought. "We were talking in the hall, and Ron came up with a gift for me." Her eyes returned to Severus. "When I opened it, a puff of smoke shot into my face. I was so mad I wanted to hex Ron." She shook her head and blushed. "I think that's all I remember. The rest of it must have been a dream."

"You were knocked unconscious. You've been here in the infirmary since."

"How long?" Hermione asked with a look of dread on her face.

"A little more than a week."

"A week? My classes!" She bolted upright, making Severus pull away from her sharply. "I was supposed to give a test to the seventh-years on Friday. I was..."

"Shhh, Hermione. We've covered your classes. Their tests have been administered and graded. The students are right where they should be."

Hermione visibly relaxed. "Thank heavens. Thank you, too, for taking care of that."

"Minerva took care of it. I was busy looking for the cure to the spell."

"What sort of spell was it?" Hermione asked.

Severus looked into her eyes. "It was the Wesley twins' experimental 'True Love' spell. Your dunderheaded friend, Weasley, thought he would prove a point by casting it on you and becoming your knight in shining armor, awakening you with a kiss. He failed to take into account the possibility that you might not love him."

Hermione paled considerably. "He tried to kiss me to pull me out of the spell?"

Severus nodded.

"And it didn't work."

"No," Severus whispered. "George later explained that only your 'true love' would be able to awaken you. I'm sorry to say that your friends marched several dozen men in here trying to revive you."

Hermione blanched. Severus' thumb made small circles on her hand, making her glance down at their grasped hands.

"I'm sorry," Severus continued. "I made them stop after a bit. They were being ridiculous. Even Potter kissed you."

Hermione touched her lips absentmindedly. "So, you released me from the spell?" she asked hesitantly after a few moments of silence between the two of them.

"Yes, I did."

A tear fell down her cheek. "I'm sorry," she said as she looked to her lap. "I never intended for you to know. I won't breathe a word of it to anyone. If you don't want to talk with me from now on, I can understand that."

Severus gazed at her in puzzlement. "Why would you say that?"

"It would be too awkward, knowing how I feel. I don't want you to be uncomfortable, Severus."

Severus reached out and took her chin in his fingers, tilting her head up so she could look into his eyes. His heart constricted within itself at her sorrow.

"Hermione, you don't understand. My feelings are just as strong as yours."

Her eyes searched his. "You... you love me?"

"I love you. I love you so much I was afraid to kiss you for fear that you wouldn't awaken for me."

"You didn't know that I loved you back?"

Severus shook his head. "I thought you just saw me as a friend. I didn't want to lose you either. I didn't want to kiss you and have you not awaken."

Hermione smiled then. "I was having the most wonderful dreams about the two of us. I was so sad to wake up and find out they weren't real."

Severus' hand moved from her chin to the back of her neck, pulling her close. "I hope I can make those dreams come true," he whispered before his lips searched out hers.

His second kiss was returned with fervor. Hermione's arms encircled him as her hand entwined in his hair. Before long, they were pulling apart, both a bit out of breath.

"I can't believe this is real! I can't believe you're actually holding me like this."

"Hermione, I will never let you go now that I know that you care about me. I love you, and you love me. The spell proves that." His eyes closed as he bent forward and touched his forehead to hers. "Without a doubt."

At that moment the doors to the infirmary burst open. Severus pulled away from Hermione, but kept her hand securely in his. He wasn't surprised to see the dunderhead duo entering with haste.

"Hermione!" Potter called enthusiastically. "You're awake!"

Weasley grinned. "I guess the spell just had to wear off, huh?"

"No..." Hermione started but was interrupted.

"I'm glad that you're up. George was saying something about you loving someone else and that he'd need to awaken you. I'll just have to tell him you woke up on your own," Weasley continued.

"Ron..."

"He seemed to think that you didn't love me."

Severus glowered at the ginger buffoon.

"I don't love you, Ron."

"Oh, come on, love. It's me! You don't have to hide your feelings from me!"

Potter, who'd evidently noticed something that Weasley hadn't, put his hand on Weasley's shoulder. "Perhaps we should let her rest. You can talk to her about this later."

Weasley foolishly shrugged Potter's hand away. "No, she's fine. Can't you see she's as perky as ever? We might as well get this over with. You all think she doesn't love me. That's not right, is it, Hermione?"

Hermione looked from Weasley to Severus to Potter, and then back to Weasley. "I don't love you, Ron. You're a wonderful friend, but we'd never work."

Weasley sputtered. "But George said your 'True Love' had to wake you up. He's obviously wrong, as you've awakened yourself. There's not been anyone in here with you but Snape since we lef..." His eyes narrowed. "Why, you right bastard."

"I assure you, Weasley, I was born of goodly parents who raised me well."

"You've been in love with her this whole time! You stole her from me!"

Weasley moved toward Severus, but Hermione jumped from the bed and moved to intercept him.

"Ron! Stop this now. I haven't loved you in years! You have insisted on hanging on to something that we had a long, long time ago. I just got tired of trying to tell you we were through. You would always ignore me when I did. Severus didn't steal anyone from anybody. He earned my love with his respect for me and his kindness towards me."

Weasley blanched. "You're talking about Snape, Hermione. He's Imperiused you or something. Snape isn't kind to anyone!"

Hermione stood straighter. "He's kind to me."

Potter took this opportunity to open his large mouth. "Hermione, are you sure about this? I mean... look at him!"

Hermione's eyes narrowed. "Do you think I haven't looked at him? Just what are you getting at?"

"He's... he's Snape!"

"He's the man I love, Harry. He awakened me, and he loves me too."

Weasley looked at her, his face angry and his body stiff. "You would give me up for him? Are you daft?"

Severus stood then. He moved between Hermione and Weasley and glared at the young man in front of him.

"Hermione has made her choice. You don't need to wibble or fight with her. Now go. I've had enough of the both of you to last an eternity."

His hand snaked around Hermione's waist as he glared at the two men in front of him. He pulled Hermione close possessively. "Go," he demanded.

"Please," Hermione said. "I'll speak with both of you when you've had time to process this. Severus and I love each other. If either of you can't accept that, then I'm sorry. I will not change simply because you feel this isn't right for me. I have never stomped on your feelings when I've thought you were with the wrong women. Please afford me the same courtesy."

Potter nodded, a mutual understanding forming between Hermione and him. Weasley, however, just sulked. "You were supposed to be mine," he muttered.

"I don't belong to anyone. I'm my own person, Ron. We were just not meant to be."

Weasley looked to the ground, turned, and moved away dejectedly. Potter nodded to Hermione. "Owl me when you're feeling up to lunch."

Soon, both men had disappeared from the room. Severus turned to Hermione and pushed a curl behind her ear. Studying her face for a moment, he pulled her to him and embraced her. They stayed that way for a few minutes.

"Are you all right?" he asked at long last. "It's not every day one tells their best friends to sod off."

Hermione pulled back and looked up at him. Nodding, she replied, "I think Harry will be all right. As for Ron..."

Severus kissed her forehead, but didn't say anything.

"He loves to sulk for months on end," Hermione explained. "When he gets tired of it, he'll come by."

"What if he never tires of it?" Severus asked.

Hermione frowned. "I will be sad if that happens, but I can't force him to be more of an adult than he'll let himself be."

"So, you're not holding out hope?"

Hermione chuckled. "No, unfortunately, I'm not." She sobered suddenly.

"What is it?" Severus asked with concern.

"I know we put up a bold front with Harry and Ron, declaring our love for each other, but honestly, we've just begun. I want this to work, and for that to happen, we'll have to work at it as well."

Severus looked into her eyes as his hand came up to caress her cheek. "We will. I don't think either one of us wants to lose this feeling."

Hermione smiled then. "No, we don't."

His third kiss was one of sheer reverence. The words 'true love' reverberated in his mind as he held Hermione close. For the first time in years, he let himself fully feel, and the feelings he felt were all-consuming. He loved her, and she loved him, and it was so much better than he'd even imagined.

Holding her close after their kiss, he whispered in her ear, "I will love you always."

She purred into him. "Me, too."

The End