

Never Assume

by Slytherin Head

Lucius sets Severus up on a blind date! Oh, dear....

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Chapter 1 of 1

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It was official: Lucius Malfoy was insane. Not to mention he was a very dead man once Severus got a hold of him. He couldn't understand what in the world would possess Lucius to set him up on a blind date. Not just any blind date, either: a blind date with Hermione Granger, as in the Hermione Granger whose best friends just happened to be Harry Potter and Ronald Weasley. Also, this happened to be the same Hermione Granger who was twenty years younger than him. How did Lucius expect them to find any common ground? He was old, always in a foul mood, and the last person anyone would want to spend time with while Hermione, on the other hand, was young, beautiful, intelligent, and one of the most sought out people in England.

To be honest, he really should have known something was wrong when he had gone to Malfoy Manor after receiving an invitation from Lucius to dinner. Narcissa looked as though she had just found a bag full of Galleons under her pillow the entire time he was there. No woman could be that giddy with joy and not be up to something. During his time with them, she kept throwing small glances at him, making him uncomfortable. By the time Lucius announced he had a surprise for him, she was practically jumping in her seat. When Lucius finally told him of his surprise, Severus deemed it a miracle Narcissa hadn't passed out from all the excitement.

After minutes of arguing with Lucius and Narcissa about not wanting to go on a "blind date," he left the Manor as quickly as possible. He could hear Lucius shout out that he would see him later that week at the small lake party they would be throwing in light of Draco's engagement to Astoria Greengrass.

And now, here he was, standing outside of Gringotts like a complete idiot.

Lucius had told him that he would find his date standing outside of Flourish and Blotts. Lucius had said in his note that he had sent Severus that morning that she would be wearing a purple sundress. Severus had spotted her even before he had completely left Gringotts, since he had gotten money to pay for the date. He hadn't wanted to believe it. In fact, he thought it was just a coincidence that Hermione was wearing the same thing that his date was supposed to be wearing, but after a couple of minutes of just waiting and watching how she seemed to look a tad depressed, he finally walked up to her and asked if Lucius had set her up as well.

It turned out that Narcissa had been the one to "convince" her to do this. When he had been prompted to ask why she had agreed to it, her answer was simply, "Please don't ask. I'm still trying to figure that one out myself."

Not wanting to continue to stand outside, he took her into the bookshop. It was the only thing he could think of that she would want to do, considering her love for books. After entering, the two of them, in quiet agreement, made their way towards the Potions section of the store, both looking at some of the new herbal books that had been recently published.

"So..." her soft voice said, breaking his train of thought. "I hear you started your own business."

"Yes, well, there wasn't much for me to do after the final battle. Minerva took her rightful place as Headmistress, and the Board of Directors didn't want an ex-Death Eater-

turned-spy teaching. So, I decided that since I had saved up enough of my money during my years at Hogwarts, I would try my hand in the world of business."

"You wouldn't have been happy being stuck at Hogwarts anyhow, would you? You hated teaching."

Looking at her for a second, Severus couldn't help the smirk that graced his face. "Ten points from Gryffindor."

"What? Why?" she asked, her voice laced with indignation. Several people looked in their direction, wondering what the trouble was.

Looking at the book in his hands, Severus took his time reading the jacket before answering her questions.

"This might come as a shock to you, but believe it or not, I actually did enjoy being a teacher. It had been my first choice of a career when I was in my fifth year. I just never wanted to teach Potions."

"We all knew you always wanted the Defense Against the Dark Arts position," Hermione said.

"I always did wonder how that rumor came about."

Hermione looked at him with confusion in her eyes. "What do you mean by 'rumor'? It was obvious you always wanted that job!"

Severus simply shook his head as he picked another book off the bookcase. "I always wanted to teach History of Magic."

"History! You're jesting!"

"I can assure you, my dear, that I do not jest."

He noticed how she looked at him, but he couldn't place the emotion. It was as if she were looking at him with slight curiosity, a look that almost willed him to realize something. But it was gone before he could truly figure it out.

"But you were always asking for the Dark Arts position, and Dumbledore would never give it to you."

"Did any of you ever see me ask for that particular teaching position?" Severus asked. He watched as she thought for a minute before shaking her head in response. "Of course not. I wanted Dumbledore to let me teach History of Magic, but he would never let me...told me that I was better off teaching Potions. He thought Binns was doing a fabulous job in teaching you lot about our world's history."

"So, it was all just a rumor?" Hermione asked with a stunned look on her face.

"Yes."

Intrigued, she leaned against the bookshelf to look at him better. "So, is the rumor of you being a vampire true?" Her voice had a small teasing tone to it, making Severus wonder why she was asking all those questions.

Putting the book he had been holding back in its proper place, he said, "My dear, have you not noticed that it is daylight out? If I were a vampire, wouldn't I have combusted into flames when I arrived outside Gringotts?"

"You are a Potions master; you could have created a sunscreen strong enough to protect you," Hermione said with a small smirk.

Severus simply chuckled lightly before moving to the cashier to pay for their books. "Then how can you explain my childhood? I can assure you, I was not born a Potions master."

Hermione was quiet as she handed him the two books she had chosen. "Well... you could have been bitten when you graduated from Hogwarts. Remus used to say that no one saw you for at least three years after you all left Hogwarts. He said that when you had resurfaced, you were different."

Paying for the books, he took them from the cashier, shrunk them and placed them in the pockets of his coat. "I was in Italy studying under Master Mancini's instructions. He was the only Potions master who was close enough for me to travel to. I can assure you, I had no wish to travel to Chile, where I knew absolutely no one."

"But I thought you were in ranks with the Death Eaters by that time!"

Gesturing at Hermione to walk ahead of him and out the shop, he said, "No. That's what Dumbledore wanted everyone to think. Honestly, I never wanted to be part of that band of idiots, but I was apparently the only person suitable for the job."

"But then, were all the memories you gave Harry lies?"

Severus stopped walking and looked at Hermione. Her face was red in anger, and she looked as if she were ready to hex him half-way across the world. Stepping closer to her, he gently said, "Those memories were true. My childhood was far from perfect. Lily Evans was my best friend until the end of our fifth year, and I was the one who had passed on the prophecy to Tom Riddle. The only thing that was not true was my affiliation with the Death Eaters. I never wanted that sort of power; I never wanted to taint my soul with that sort of evil."

"I really should stop assuming things, shouldn't I?" Hermione asked in a timid voice.

"It would help to keep arguments from arising every five minutes," Severus responded with a small smirk.

With a quick smile from her, he took her hand and placed it on his arm, leading them down Diagon Alley. He didn't want to treat her to lunch in a place where everyone seemed to be gawking at them. He knew a nice place in Muggle London that he knew she would love.

"I honestly can't help it, though. Everything I've ever heard about you and assumed I knew about you was never true. It's like I'm really on a date with a total stranger."

Severus looked at her as he guided them to the Leaky Cauldron. "I always expected you to be one of the few who didn't think I was a vampire."

He heard her chuckle slightly at that. "I never did," she said. "The signs were obvious to those who knew them. But you have to admit, you did fit the description of one quite perfectly. Even Harry said that when he saw you flying out the window before the final battle started, you looked like a huge bat flying in the sky."

"I have no comment to that statement," was Severus' simple reply.

They continued walking; neither one of them was in a hurry to leave, even though they were receiving a lot of stares from the people shopping around Diagon Alley.

"Miss Granger..."

"Hermione," she said firmly. Stopping, she turned to look at him straight in his eyes. "I think that under these conditions, we could call each other by our given names?"

His lips twitched in an almost smile as he nodded in agreement and once again took her hand, placing it on his arm. "Hermione, would you mind terribly if I asked a somewhat personal question?"

"Well, we are on a date. That's what people do on dates, isn't it? Get to know each other by asking questions."

"Very well." With a small pause he braced himself for her reaction. He knew that she might not want to answer, and the possibilities of her overreacting were high. "Would you mind telling me the truth?"

"What truth?" she asked. Her voice had changed in tone, and he could feel her tensing just the slightest bit.

"The truth...being how Narcissa managed to get you to agree to a blind date?"

She was quiet for a long time, and before he knew it, they were already standing in front of the brick wall which would allow them to make their way into the Leaky Cauldron. Unable to keep a small sigh from escaping his lips, he took her hand from his arm and took out his wand. It seemed to him like he had ruined the day for the both of them.

Even if he knew she had lied to him, he shouldn't have asked her. He should have just gone on with his plans and then escorted her back to her home. After that he could have gone back to his home and planned on how to get back at Lucius and Narcissa.

"I asked her."

"What?" he asked. He had almost missed the words that she had spoken but was sure he had heard them. "What did you say?" he asked again when she didn't respond.

She was looking at the floor, but even then he could see that she was embarrassed at her confession. Walking up to her, he took her chin in his hand and gently lifted her face to look at him.

"She wanted me to go to Draco's engagement party. After the war, Draco and I formed a... small friendship, if you will. She found out about it and seized it as an opportunity to show the public that her family never hated Muggle-borns and were simply forced to act the way they did."

Severus watched as she took his hand and examined it bit by bit. All the small cuts and burns were inspected with great interest. "I had already planned on going to the party. Astoria and I have been friends since before the war. Narcissa didn't know of course. When she approached me, she had said she would do anything if I were to attend. I almost said no, just to see what she would do. But then I thought, 'Why not?' and asked her if she could possibly set up a date for me with you."

"Why with me?" Severus asked. "Why me, when you could probably have any man you wanted?"

Lacing her fingers with his, she said, "Do you want the clichéd answer?"

"I would like an honest answer, please."

"I chose you, Severus Snape, because every time I hear your name, my heart feels like it's about to run away just to find you. Every time I hear your voice, everything around me fades into the background. I chose you because I'm truly, madly, deeply in love with you."

Severus could feel his face heating up with embarrassment from her confession. Surely she must be joking. There was no way anyone could possibly love him. "Do you honestly expect me to believe that?" he asked with a slight sneer in his tone. "Do you honestly expect me to believe that you are all of a sudden in love with me, when not ten minutes ago, you didn't even know me?"

"You honestly don't remember, do you?" Hermione asked sadly.

"Remember what, exactly?"

"Those weeks when you were fighting against Nagini's venom."

Severus looked at her in confusion, wondering what she was talking about. "There's not much to remember. I was bitten and then I woke up in St. Mungo's feeling as if Hagrid had played football and used me as the ball."

He saw her struggle with what she wanted to tell him, wondering how much she should say. What had happened that he didn't know, yet she did? Severus looked on as she bit her lip and gave him a sideways glance before taking a deep breath.

"It was Ginny and I who had found you. As soon as we realized that you were still alive, I sent my Patronus to Poppy telling her where you were and your condition. When she got there, she used her emergency Portkey and took you to the Hospital Wing, immediately working on healing your wound." Here she paused, obviously still remembering that day vividly. "We wanted to transfer you to St. Mungo's, along with the rest that were injured, but the risk of you getting injured was too high."

"While you were there, you were running a high fever due to Nagini's venom. Poppy couldn't give you too much of the anti-venom because it would counteract the other potions she had to give you. I helped her take care of you, Severus. I couldn't let Poppy wear herself out; you saw how worn out she was because of the Carrows. While she tended to herself, I watched over you. I took that time to try and figure you out. One night, when your fever had spiked up, we started talking. You told me how you wished you could have stayed in Italy longer. I thought you were imagining it, but then you started speaking Italian, apologizing to your master for not being able to take over his business."

Severus didn't know whether to be angry that she seemed to have gotten his whole life story from him while he was so ill or amused that she had learned more about him while he was out cold than most people learned while torturing him.

"Everything you told me during those days when I looked after you," she continued, "is something I treasure so very much. You see, in those days I came to realize just what an amazing human being you are. Do you remember the Potioneers convention in Milan?"

The sudden change in topic threw Severus off. Not trusting his voice to work he simply nodded his head.

"Do you remember a woman by the name of Jean Elstworth?"

Shock ran through Severus' body at the mention of Jean Elstworth. He had met her at the convention and had even gone on a couple of dates with her during that month he had been there. She had been quite the conversationalist, and he had had some of the most enjoyable debates that he could ever remember having with anyone. "How did you know?"

She smiled shyly at him before answering, "I had been invited to that same convention. Professor Slughorn had mentioned my name to the people organizing it, and they asked me to come. Obviously, I couldn't let the opportunity pass by, so I agreed to go, but under one condition: that I could go undercover. I didn't want people to know that I was going, so I told them to register me under the name of Jean Elstworth."

"And not once during that time we spent talking could you have told me who you really were?" Severus asked with a scowl.

Before she could answer, a group of elderly witches shoved them out of the way. It seemed they had been standing behind them waiting for one of them to open the wall. Taking her hand, Severus moved them towards the small cafe shop next to the entrance. Asking for two waters so they wouldn't be asked to leave, he turned to Hermione, and with a small wave of his hand motioned her to go on.

"Because," she stated sadly, "you would have told me to bugged off. It was still two years after the final battle, and you could not stand the sight of Harry, Ron and me. I knew that if I told you who I really was, you would never talk to me the way you did with 'Jean.'"

He watched as she took one of his hands in hers. The gesture, so familiar from all those times that Jean had done it, yet watching Hermione do it, made his heart do a

somersault.

"Why? Why ask me all those questions back there in the bookstore, if you already knew the answers?" he asked her.

"I wanted to see if you would give me the same answers that you had given me when I had taken care of you and later on when I pretended to be Jean."

Severus was quiet as he pondered everything she had told him. "If you knew all of this," he stated, "why were you so upset when I mentioned that I had never wanted to be a Death Eater and that it had all been Dumbledore's idea to lie to everyone?"

A smug smile was thrown at him as she said, "Mum always thought I would be good at theater."

"You mean to tell me that all of this has just been an act?" The urge to leave her there and go back to his house was strong. He had been played a fool since the moment they had started talking.

"No! Severus, I did not lie when I said I love you. I felt something for you when I was taking care of you, yet it wasn't until the convention that I realized my feelings for you."

A heavy silence hung about them as he tried to decide whether to trust her word or not. "I must confess that I had seen a bit of the real you in Jean... How... how will I know that you will not be like Lily and throw me out as soon as you get tired of me?"

He had not meant to say those words, but they had escaped his lips before he had truly thought about what he wanted to say. They were true though; his mind had thought of Hermione often when he had been with Jean. He had thought that both of them were so eager to learn, yearning to learn and to help those in need with their knowledge. He had quickly tried to send any sentiments he felt for Hermione to the deepest reaches of Hell. There was no way that she would ever feel anything for him.

But now, now that he knew the whole truth, could he actually let his heart out of its shell and give it to someone to care for it?

"Tell me, what exactly do I gain by lying to you?" Hermione questioned him, letting go of his hand.

In all honesty, there was nothing. Sure, he could claim that all she wanted was to make fun of him, but the Hermione Granger he knew would never do that. Unless it was something about Rita Skeeter, then she might make an exception. Other than that, there was no reason why he should be suspicious of her motives.

"I'm not a nice man."

"And Merlin forbid I should ever accuse you of being one."

"I'm..."

"Severus Snape, if you say you're too old for me, I'm afraid I'll have to duel you right here, right now."

One look into her eyes confirmed how serious she was. Hermione Granger was living up to her reputation and was not going to take 'no' for an answer.

"Look," she said, letting her temper simmer down a tad. "Just give us a chance. I promise, if things don't work out between us in two months, then I'll gladly admit that I was wrong, but I don't want to live my life wondering what could have happened between us."

"Don't you want to *assume* what might happen?" Severus teased her.

Hermione pretended to look offended but couldn't help looking at him with pleading eyes.

"So," he said as he took her hand in his. They both stood up and made their way back to the brick wall. "Should I pick you up at your flat, or would you like to meet at Malfoy Manor next week for the engagement party?"

"Actually," Hermione said with a thoughtful look on her face. "Why don't we meet tomorrow? I need help finding Narcissa a thank you gift for giving me the opportunity to finally confess to you."

Severus felt her small hand squeeze his as she waited for him to form the pattern on the brick wall that would allow them to enter the Leaky Cauldron.

"Very well, but you'll have to come with me to Mr. Weasley's shop and pick out a little present for Lucius."

Hermione's soft laughter made him almost want to smile himself.

A/N: This was written in response to the Hogwarts Online II "Free as a Bird" May challenge over at FF.net. No real challenge, just write whatever you want. I hope you all enjoy this story!

I would like to thank my amazing beta, debjunk, for all her help with this story. We did spend about three weeks working on this and making sure it was good for you all to read. Also, thank you to XoXsectumsempraXoX for looking over this and giving me her opinion.