

Saffron

by Jinxie

Hermione's visit to a restaurant run by none other than Severus Snape leads them both to new places of discovery and healing.

Warning: Food Pron!

All in One

Chapter 1 of 1

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"Hermione, have you been to the new restaurant run by Snape?" Ginny Potter asked over a cup of tea.

"Snape, as in *Professor* Snape?" At the other witch's nod of affirmation, she replied, "No, Ginny. But I seem to recall Minerva mentioning it in a letter a while back. I think she thought of it as a kind of talking point, I guess, seeing as I was training to become a pâtissier. It's possibly because of my past experience as a sous chef, she thought we'd be working in the same, if not similar, circles or something of the sort. Though a sous chef is quite different to an executive chef," Hermione replied contemplatively.

"Sous chef, pâtissier chef it's all French to me," Ginny giggled as she waved about one of Hermione's homemade marshmallow raspberry petit fours before popping it in her mouth with relish. "Hmm, chocolate ..." she gurgled while doing her best Homer Simpson impression.

Hermione rolled her eyes and replied, "Ha, ha very funny. That was quite tame, compared to some of the jokes I got off of Harry and Ron."

Sipping her tea, she continued, "Yes, well those two would make jokes, and then end up regretting it once you withheld food."

"True. But, then again all they have to do is pay a visit to your mum," Hermione said pointedly.

"Yeah, but Mum isn't a qualified *gourmet* chef."

"Really, Gin, it's nothing extraordinary," Hermione pleaded. "It's not like I'm an international Quidditch star."

"Okay, you've got me there, Hermione. But, still, it's a skill I wish I had," she said wistfully.

"With your mum, I'm surprised you're not," Hermione replied as she pushed the plate of cakes back towards Ginny, where she selected one of the miniature lemon tarts with coconut pastry and scooped the cream off the top with one finger.

"Well, with her dominance in the kitchen, you'd be afraid to step foot in there too. Besides, by the time I get home from Quidditch, the last thing on my mind is cooking an elaborate meal. I must say I do enjoy having my own private domestic god waiting for me," Ginny said with a smile, as she scooped off the cream from the top of another tart and popped it into her mouth.

Making mock gagging noises, Hermione said, trying not to giggle, "I'm sure Harry would enjoy being referred to as a 'domestic god,' Madam Lady of Leisure!"

"Give over!" Ginny replied, laughing at her friend's comment, and finished the tart.

Face serious, Hermione asked, "So, would you like to go try it?"

"Of course as if you have to ask!" Ginny replied enthusiastically. "The food's supposed to be absolutely divine. It's all that anyone can go on about in *Witch Weekly* and the *Prophet*. Even *The Quibbler* had an article about it and how good the food is."

"Really? In *The Quibbler*?" Hermione asked skeptically.

"Really," Ginny affirmed contemplatively. "Mind you, they somehow managed to mention Nargles and whatnot in the article, but the restaurant still had a good write-up."

"Sounds good to me. Should we go tonight?"

"Are you serious? You have to wait at least a week to get a table there! We could book tonight for next weekend, though."

"Wow. It must be pretty good, or at least the novelty of it is." Hermione remarked thoughtfully. "Why not? That gives us more time to plan a night out. Should we invite anyone else," she said contemplatively in conversation with herself. "No. On second thought, leave it at just us. I like to be able to hear myself think, and we can make a real night of it. If we want to carry on after that, we can do so."

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*The décor is elegant but understatedly bland. It isn't anything spectacular to look at, so it must be the food that draws the crowds, if not the owner himself: one, Severus Snape. Even though five years have passed since the war, people are still drawn to see him and anything attached to his name. Especially, if there is a possibility that the man himself will be cooking in his own restaurant. Few people knew he was still a teacher. Although he no longer teaches Potions, he does teach cooking lessons on the sly instead. It's probably just as well that it's not widely known amongst the Wizarding population,* Hermione thought to herself as she perused the menu.

*The presentation of the dishes is fantastic,* Hermione thought to herself as she watched a Steak Oscar go past with the asparagus spears stretched and formed into interesting and aesthetically pleasing shapes. The scent of crab, steak and Béarnaise sauce wafted its way to her, making her mouth water.

"The menu is absolutely amazing, Ginny, but with a restaurant named *Saffron*, one would think there would be a reason for it," Hermione said, frowning slightly. "I don't believe it's even an ingredient in half the dishes. It's so easy to use and multipurpose. Plus, the flavouring, the colouring and decorative ability... But, I digress."

"Easy for you, maybe," Ginny answered laughing slightly, pouring wine for the pair of them. "But, yes. You do. Try not to worry on it and just enjoy the night."

"Alright, alright. Cooking mode now turning off, and officially relaxing," Hermione joked, hands in the air in mock submission, unaware of the man approaching behind her.

"Well, well, if it isn't two of recent history's infamous witches gracing my restaurant. Hands in the air, still looking for attention, I see, Miss Granger," Severus Snape, owner and executive chef of *Saffron*, said, turning his head to look Hermione Granger in the eye, and nodding to Ginevra Potter in an informal greeting.

Turning, Hermione answered, "Oh, hello, Mr. Snape. We thought we'd have a try of your new establishment, after all the rave reviews we've been reading and hearing about."

"Is that so, Miss Granger? Is it living up to your expectations?" he asked with raised eyebrow and a look of amusement in his dark eyes.

"Yes and yes. Though I must say you do have a shockingly low number of dishes with saffron on your menu or is there some other hidden meaning in the name of the restaurant?"

Stiffening his posture slightly at this comment, he replied, "The restaurant has a multitude of reasons for its name. Unfortunately, due to demand, I was forced to open earlier than anticipated. Once finished, I believe my reasoning for the name will be abundantly clear to all."

"That was quite a bold move on your part to open a restaurant unfinished. I would have expected you to be more meticulous about this, sir."

"Yes, well, it was more of a last minute decision."

"If that's the case, I anticipate seeing the décor and the dishes you will come out with. I could think of any number of dishes that would include saffron in them or as a garnish."

"Is that so, Miss Granger?" he asked in consideration.

"Oh yes, Mr. Snape. Our Hermione, here, is a dab hand in the kitchen. She worked as a sous chef in a few Muggle restaurants, after leaving Hogwarts. And, she's recently qualified as a pâtissier, too!" Hermione tried in vain to shush Ginny as her face reddened in embarrassment.

"Indeed, Miss Granger?" Severus asked, with raised eyebrow.

"Y-yes, Mr. Snape. I recently qualified from Le Cordon Bleu."

"So you opted to only take the *Diplôme de Pâtisserie*, then?" he asked.

"No. I intended to study for the *Diplôme de Pâtisserie*, but opted for the *Grand Diplôme* instead. As much as I love pâtissier, I believe a solid foundation in cooking is far more beneficial when creating dishes to complement a meal."

"Ever the know-it-all," he said with a smirk. Nodding in acknowledgement, he continued, "Although, an excellent display of sound judgement, Miss Granger."

"Thank you, sir. Though, I must admit I was rather disappointed to miss your own display at the school."

"Yes, well my time is a commodity, and it was a one-off return to teaching, I assure you," he replied. "After seventeen years of teaching at Hogwarts and nearly five years reprieve, it's not an experience I seek to willingly inflict upon myself. I now have the choice and luxury of only working with experienced chefs."

"May I extend my apologies, sir? It must have been horribly traumatic standing at the front of the kitchen classroom with all those knives at your disposal, knowing how easy it would be to slip and draw blood if they got too out of control."

"Impertinent witch!" he snapped, though she could've sworn his eyes briefly flashed with amusement, bringing an end to that discussion. He soon bid both his farewell, wishing them an enjoyable evening and extending an open invitation for Hermione to brainstorm with him on new dishes, if she so chose.

As he walked away, Ginny commented, "Well, that was certainly unexpected."

"Very much so, Gin," Hermione said somewhat bemused as she took a sip of wine. Ideas were forming in her head as she contemplated the recent conversation.

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Early the next morning Hermione woke with determination on her mind. *Today, I'm going to find Professor Snape and bring my proposal regarding his restaurant and ideas to him. For some reason the name has caught my interest, and I can't let go of the thoughts spinning in my head until I go and speak with him.* With that on her mind, Hermione proceeded to visit *Saffron* and its owner.

"Miss Granger, what on earth would make you think that I would hire you, a pâtissier, in my restaurant as a sous chef?"

"Pâtissier or not anything that goes in the oven is baking. And although your menu is excellent, it is quite easy for me to prepare. I can not only cook your menu, but I could improve upon it and improvise when needed especially for your desserts. They are, after all, the final part of the dining experience. Having an excellent meal then a disappointing or inadequate dessert leaves a diner with dissatisfaction. The meal is incomplete and lacking without the palate experiencing a full array of flavours and textures. You wouldn't have a slice of sachertorte after having duck with cherries and chocolate ganache. It would be too rich and your palate wouldn't properly be able to enjoy the sachertorte. You would walk away not being able to properly distinguish between your main and your pudding. Instead, serve a Kiwi Pavlova Fool with it, the sweet, refreshingly juicy kiwi balances out the white chocolate, cream and crushed meringue. Letting the guest leave knowing distinctly they had separate courses. Besides, it's also a nice, light dessert," she said almost flirtatiously.

"Fools are easy to handle, Miss Granger," he said jokingly.

Sniggering, she answered, "Indeed, sir. That, they are. Besides, having my cooking skills in the kitchen would free up your time to focus on finishing *Saffron* to your exacting standards in a minimal amount of time. Plus, you'd have me, my desserts and finishing touches at your disposal." She finished her speech by presenting herself with a slight flourish.

"Any number of chefs would be able to do as you have stated."

"Yes, but how many chefs can navigate cooking between the Muggle and Magical worlds? As I mentioned last night, although your restaurant is called *Saffron*, it is exceedingly lacking of saffron as an ingredient in the meals. With a name as evocative and exotic as the spice, you are missing out on a possible direction for this establishment."

Eyebrow raised, whether in scepticism or amazement she couldn't tell, he replied, "Really, Miss Granger? And how would you improve upon it?"

"I don't know how you intend to redecorate this restaurant, Mr. Snape, but I imagine the place to be something reminiscent of the spice markets of the east: bright, colourful and exotically scented. I'm not saying you need to have the place look or smell like a spice market, but I wouldn't expect it to look so austere out there. Maybe walls painted the colour of ground cinnamon with dark wood panelling and a hint of purple and red. Perhaps a few pictures with possible close-ups of the *Saffron Crocus*? They could be highlighting the purple flowers with their vivid auburn stamens, ready and waiting to be picked, up on the walls."

Waving his hand in dismissal, he responded, "Well, that's the décor, but I'm more interested in the food. What do you have in mind in that regard?"

"In addition to that, you could take the gastronomical experience so much further than just taste. *Saffron* has so many different purposes. It can be used in cooking, in medicine and even in divination."

"Hmm. As delightful as your words are, Miss Granger, that's all they are until you can prove otherwise to me. Since words seem to be failing you in answering my questions, I'll give you half an hour to cook for me. I want one three-course meal with a pudding, utilising your pâtissier skills."

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir! You'll have your dishes before that time!"

"Half an hour; thirty minutes, Miss Granger not a second longer," he called out to her as he left the kitchen. She didn't need to know that he would be watching her from his office, but then again, after seven years of being a student in his classroom, she should be used to his presence when completing tasks.

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For the newly graduated Hermione Granger, this was a fantastic test of her abilities. She hated not being able to balance the sweet with the savoury in a meal. So, made sure she learned how to cook properly before specialising her training to become a pâtissier. It was a good thing her parents loved world foods and encouraged varied tastes in their daughter from a young age. This started off her palate and acceptance of all flavours and experiences.

Not only did she have a thirst for knowledge in general but a desire to know the history behind modern dishes. Sometimes, the haute couture food of today seemed to pale in comparison to dishes of the past. Hermione decided to not limit herself to just one region to draw inspiration from to create her dishes.

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Watching Hermione as she flitted about the kitchen, seemingly everywhere all at once, he couldn't help but think that perhaps she really did have a passion and love for what she was doing. Her economy of movement, the blending of preparing and cooking by hand as well as speeding along parts of recipes that would have taken a Muggle much, much longer to complete, allowed her to fit it all into one half hour test of her skills.

Spying a smirk on Hermione's face as she worked at adding ingredients to one pan, Severus couldn't help but wonder what amused the witch so as she was cooking. She seemed so poised, self-assured and natural in her movements as well as at what she was doing. He noted that she really had a genuine talent for her work. She wasn't another one of the grasping wannabe 'cooks' who plagued him every so often, wanting to work in his restaurant just to be close to him. His thoughts turning down that route was enough to make him shudder. He couldn't see Hermione Granger, former Hogwarts resident know-it-all, seeking glory in his kitchen when there was a font of knowledge in the world outside of *Saffron*.

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She started with Seared Spanish Sea Scallops with Saffron as her starter. Hard seared on one side, then flipped over to simmer in sweet onions, saffron, ham, parsley and a little sherry. At the addition of the sherry, Hermione couldn't help but picture Professor Trelawney marinating in sherry, making the witch smirk to herself and nearly miss the timing of the scallops. She had to push herself to pay attention and not let her mind wander. She only had half an hour to complete all three dishes.

Following the scallops, she chose to do Foie Gras with Yellow Peach and Yellow Peach-Saffron Beurre Blanc and Puff Pastry for the main course. The foie gras was stuffed inside pan-seared duck and served with a thinly sliced, poached peach fanned alongside it on the plate with a small puff pastry beside them, topped by a mouthful of mixed greens, all drizzled with the peach-saffron beurre blanc. It was a combination of sweet and savoury. Also, this dish wasn't specifically of any regional or historical significance. It merely contained saffron as an ingredient in the sauce over the peaches.

The mixture of textures and colours was a sight to behold.

For her pudding, she chose a Saffron Yogurt Mousse with Rose Petal Honey. The mousse was a risk, as it was a take on the traditional Indian Shrikhand. However, the addition of gelatine allowed it to be moulded instead of just sitting in a dish to be scooped out. The hot pink petals peeking out of the dessert and sitting atop it were a brilliant contrast to the white dessert, making it look both dainty and mouth wateringly exotic and romantic. The creamy taste and texture were balanced by the fragrantly sweet honey.

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Just before the half hour was up, Severus walked into the kitchen to watch her as she finished plating her creations. The sight of the three dishes before him was intriguing, and he couldn't help but wonder how each of these dishes would taste, containing saffron. The astringent, sometimes metallic tasting spice wasn't always to everyone's preference. Then again, if there was anything he'd learned as a chef, it was that cooked and balanced properly, anything could be enjoyed immensely.

The scents, colours and textures she created for him were a sight to behold. He didn't think he could have done much better if he were only given half an hour. However, tasting each dish brought his appreciation for Hermione's cooking to a new level, so that by the time he reached her dessert, he was nearly beside himself enjoying these creations.

Once Severus came to his senses, his eyes met Hermione in unspoken acknowledgement of the moment he shared with her dessert, and he cleared his throat. "I don't think further proof is needed, Miss Granger. I think I could use you in my kitchen after all. Perhaps you could fill both the roles of sous chef and pâtissier?"

Hermione danced with delight in her mind, biting back a smile while standing poised before this austere man. "It's certainly something we could work on. And please, call me Hermione."

"Hermione it is, then," he said with a sharp nod. "If you have the time, I would like to invite you to come discuss my plans for the restaurant, and what your role would be. If not, I can send you the information by owl."

She didn't hesitate with her response, and they headed off together into his office to the side of the kitchen.

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It was a tired Hermione who came home that night, still on a high from the unspoken praise from Severus Snape. If ever there was a moment she wished Colin Creevey could have been there with his camera, it would have been the moment he tasted her mousse. She would relish the sight of Severus Snape closing his eyes in obvious bliss and the barely perceptible sigh of delight at the first taste of this dessert for a very, very long time. If ever there was a compliment to one's craftsmanship that was it. More's the pity that you couldn't make photographs from memories.

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Working at *Saffron* was hard and often demanding work. Severus was just as much the task master in the kitchen that he was in the dungeon classroom, but his standards were still the same, if not even higher, now that his personal and financial reputations were on the line. However, he did seem to be a bit harsher whenever Hermione wasn't around, or so the other staff liked to think. Perhaps it was the way she had of ignoring him that didn't seem to ruffle him too much or just her similar, yet slightly friendlier personality that seemed to soften his countenance. No matter the reasons, the other kitchen staff members were happy to have Hermione on board.

As the days turned into weeks and finally into months, Severus slowly extracted himself from the kitchen and gradually handed over its quality control and care over to Hermione. The confidence he showed in her ability to run the kitchen efficiently was reward enough to her, but she couldn't help at times, feeling at a bit of a loss, not working on her beloved desserts as frequently as she would have liked. However, Severus did let her create and introduce a few dishes to the menu, which she enjoyed immensely. Their popularity just proved that it was a wise choice on their part. The amount of time she put in at the restaurant didn't give her a chance to think of missing the banter she once shared with the former Potions master, or at least not frequently.

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As Severus extricated himself from the hands on running and management of his kitchen and restaurant, he turned his focus to making *Saffron* everything he wanted it to be. He started this venture with the private function rooms. Rooms no one but he was aware existed.

Each room had a theme and a purpose. He planned to utilise the history of the places that used saffron in their cultures as a backdrop for these rooms. Sure, there's the main dining room, where just anyone can have a meal. Those meals were spectacular but not full sensory experiences, which was what Severus wanted to give those guests who were willing to experience them. The rooms would be modified combinations of a Portkey and the Room of Requirement, allowing people to be in different locations, while enjoying his fine cuisine that was tailored to their location and their needs. There would be several locations witches and wizards could choose from in the ten private rooms that branched off from the main dining room.

Severus was nothing, if not thorough in trying to make the experience unique for his diners. He wanted them to be able to embrace the history and the places he would be presenting to the Wizarding community at large as well as the ingredient that inspired his success in the culinary industry. He chose to have a room of Greco-Roman origin, and rooms from Spain, North America, and Persia, as well a few more remote locations from Wizarding Britain.

He chose dishes from each region as well as historical dishes to represent the nature of the saffron spice. The meals would be culinary masterpieces, which would utilise the magic and healing properties of saffron. These rooms and their special menus were more than just mere meals; they were food for the soul.

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Once Severus decided on the locations and drew up a general idea for the menus, he was stuck on puddings. As much as he wished it, he knew he would need Hermione's help in order to finish this project to his satisfaction. Despite the restaurant opening without being 'finished', he was loath for anyone to see these precious rooms if they didn't have to. However, the thought of sharing them with Hermione somehow wasn't such a heavy thought on his mind. In fact, the more Severus thought about it, the more the idea seemed right and natural. She had come to be a great sounding board for ideas in the past, yet in the last several months of working purely on the rooms, he missed their daily interactions and being able to wind her up over simple things.

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Upon Severus' special summons to come in on her day off for a discussion on the future of the restaurant, Hermione couldn't help but wonder if something was wrong with the way she was running the kitchens in his absence. It had been several months since she'd taken over for him, so he could 'finish' the restaurant, as he said. Whatever that entailed.

Hermione's apprehension grew as she arrived at *Saffron* to find that not only was she alone in the restaurant, but apparently, the restaurant was closed for the day and all of the staff were given the day off. However, Severus soon came walking into the dining room and greeted Hermione as usual, immediately putting her at ease, though she couldn't help but wonder what was going on. *He wouldn't greet me as if nothing were wrong if there really is a problem, would he?*

As Severus gave her a brief run through of what he'd been doing, he showed her several of the rooms and what they were capable of. There were so many rooms to choose from that she struggled to take in all of the sights and settings completely. Each of the rooms was like a portal to a different place, a different aspect of the history of the spice itself. One could experience the sights, smells and sounds of being at each location, without actually being there. One would be impervious to the weather but bask in the beauty and the mystique. It was going to be a truly divine sensory dining experience once completed. Fortunately, Severus could manage to change the smells of less pleasing locations. After all, he didn't believe the smell of faeces and urine would be productive to the palates enjoying his take on the Roman meals of days gone past. *Trust him to make such a beastly comment like that amongst all the beauty!*

Despite how overwhelmed Hermione felt about the rooms, she noticed that each room had the saffron crocus within sight in varying stages of growth or a depiction of its use throughout history. There were ancient murals depicting its medicinal uses, from Cleopatra bathing in it for its aphrodisiac properties to treating the Black Death in the mediaeval era. The medicinal uses were endless, as it could be used to treat digestive disorders to regaining mental balance from depression or migraines. Other scenes depicted makeup applications and perfumery, clothes dye to pigments for painting and creating other murals or frescos. While there were the murals in some of the older locations, other rooms were decorated with the end products of saffron: dyed luscious fabrics draping around palace verandas overlooked seemingly endless expanses of

water in India, while the scent of saffron and cinnamon wafted in the air. Not mentioning the culinary possibilities, the uses for the spice were seemingly limitless!

Hermione's mind was still reeling. She was only half-listening to the soft hum and cadence of Severus' voice as he continued on with the narrative that he planned to use as PR for the new rooms. "... It's a tantalizing spice that comes from the dried stamen of the purple, autumn-flowering crocus sativus," she heard him say as he came to a stopping point. It was all absolutely awe-inspiring for Hermione. She could see for herself just how much the stamen from a simple little purple crocus meant to history, and especially to the man who stood before her.

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Severus led Hermione into his two favourite rooms last, as he wanted them to be the most memorable to Hermione. They were the rooms into which he put the most effort and dedication. The foods that he would cook, taken from and inspired by the history of these locations, were the most unusual and evocative dishes and his favourites, to boot.

There would be a Greco-Roman room, where guests would be seated in the great palace of Knosos, long believed by Muggles to have crumbled to dust but still standing and flourishing in Wizarding Crete. From one side of the palace, you could see the labyrinth and the tips of the horn of the Minotaur housed within it. From the other, you could see and smell the fields of saffron growing in the distance, being tended by young girls and monkeys. The walls inside the palace depict frescos showing the history of the medicinal uses of saffron from Greco-Roman times.

The meals served would primarily be Roman in origin, if not variations on dishes straight out of Marcus Gavius Apicius *De Re Coquinaria* (on cooking), the first Roman cookbook. There would be the delicacy of Glikes, or stuffed dormouse. It was almost a laughable dish, as dormice were running rampant through Wizarding Britain while their non-magical counterparts weren't so common. Some of the other dishes were just too unusual for Severus to be able to expect his guests to eat served with the same presentation they would have had in Greco-Roman times, though that didn't mean he still couldn't serve them. *Although it would be amusing to me, I doubt many would enjoy having a hog roast cut open in front of them, only to have sausages falling out, mimicking the butchering of the hog.* He knew that if he even tried it, Hermione would have him strung up for upsetting the guests. However, there were a few guests with whom he could probably get away with it, like the Weasley twins, though they'd probably want to stick some of their own products in the hog for greater dramatic effect when entertaining.

Regardless, all diners would be served Conditum Paradoxum, roughly translated as extraordinary spiced wine, with the first course of their meals. Extraordinarily spiced, indeed; the making of said wine was akin to making a potion containing saffron, honey, pepper, cinnamon and dates, to name a few ingredients. Just the thought of the wine set Severus to brew it mentally.

The composition of this extraordinary spiced wine is as follows: Place 5.4 L of honey in a bronze vessel, having previously added 1.8 L of wine. In this way, the wine shall be boiled off in the melting honey. The mixture is heated by a slow fire of dry wood and stirred, to boiling, with a wooden rod...

His thoughts were still on brewing the Conditum Paradoxum as they left the room, heading toward another door, where he mentally prepared himself for the onslaught of his more favoured of the two, Persia.

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The Greco-Roman room was intriguing with the sight of the Minotaur and the frescos. However, the Persian room... well, it was the one that stood out the most in Hermione's mind. It was very simplistic yet complex in itself. Not unlike the man in front of her. It didn't have any paintings or unusual beasts to see. It was a simple landscape view from what appeared to be a home set upon the top of a mountain, overlooking Isfahan in Iran. It was a gorgeous sight to behold the plain, where so many saffron crocuses grow and have grown for millennia. You could see the dedication and taste the history of the area just by looking out over the fields of purple.

On the ground of the room, there were several Persian rugs laid out, with a white cloth run along them and cushions surrounding it, allowing for traditional seating. Severus described to her the foods that would be served in a nearly traditional manner. First, there would be the customary coffee, and he would ensure the ancient dishes of Parthian would be served: finger foods of saffron rice and many other rice dishes combined with a little meat, fish, fowl, vegetable, herbs and fruits, creating a balanced and colourful yet healthy diet. Simple yet exotic.

Finally, the meals will be finished with either coffee or Saffron tea to aid digestion and provide any multitude of health benefits, such as keeping depression at bay. Hermione contemplated the uses as Severus spoke. It was the history of the uses of saffron tea which intrigued Hermione most, especially when Severus mentioned menstruation relief while going bright red. *The poor man! I had to turn toward the door to leave to attempt to cover the smile that appeared on my face at his discomfort.*

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The first-hand experience of and thought put into the portals brought tears to Hermione's eyes. It was everything she had imagined the restaurant could be and more. *He must've listened to what I was telling him from the start, or at least incorporated it into his thoughts for the décor when he gave me the chance to cook for him.*

"Each room will react to the guests. Their wants, their health, their desires... All are taken into consideration. The orders then appear in the kitchen accordingly. This has become more than just a restaurant, Hermione. This is a rebalancing for some and a chance for others to move forward, past their ailments and afflictions."

"So, it'll almost be like going to a health spa, without the physical treatments."

"Yes, in a way, except the treatments will be purely gastronomic and aesthetic instead."

"It's a fantastic idea, Severus! Why did you decide to share this with me today? Don't you want the staff to see it before you open it?"

"Well, yes, the rest of the staff will see it once it's completed," he said carefully. "I'm sure they'll want to see the rooms and analyse and dissect every little detail to the minutiae, so as not to annoy me with figuring out how to best do the presentation and such." He said dismissively while waving a hand in a parallel gesture. "But I need *your* help, Hermione."

"Anything. As I've said before, I'm at your disposal, Severus," she said half-jokingly.

Ignoring her joke, Severus continued, "Hermione, you weren't the only one to know the history and uses of saffron. It was you opening your mouth and spouting off about it that intrigued me. And it made me realise that I wasn't the only one with a potential vision of what this place could be. Your reasons were for pure, literal ones, while mine, mine were for medicinal and historical ones. Saffron had a large part in my life through the years, and saved it after the events of the war."

Her eyes were automatically drawn to his throat at the mention of the war. The thought of what Nagini did to his throat, and the mental and physical scars that were hidden below his shirt's collar, flashed through her mind as he spoke. "Yes, saffron in its multitude of medicinal uses; it can be used for skin conditions, migraines, depression... so, so many things. It's helped me to find balance in my life at difficult times over the years. These past several months working without you, Hermione, made me realise how much I appreciate and have missed listening to your insights, input and eye for detail."

Oh. She thought somewhat disbelieving, *how flattering.*

"Don't look at me like that, Hermione. It's more than just the working relationship that I missed about you, and you know it, too. I wanted to see your eyes when I first tried out each of the rooms. Sure, you've now seen the nearly finished project, but to see your face and eyes light up in delight or thoughtful contemplation, knowing just what is missing or needed as each part of my plan came to fruition is all the confirmation and reassurance I need to know I've started this off in the right direction," he said to her, his expression unreadable. She looked at the door to one of the rooms. "Look at my eyes. You're needed. By me. I need you in my restaurant but more importantly, in my life. I've managed by myself for so long, Hermione. I don't want that anymore. I'm not saying we have to rush everything tonight, but perhaps, take this as a business partnership first and go from..."

His words were cut off, as she kissed him. It didn't matter what he intended to say after that. She gave her answer in her kiss. If he couldn't get the message, she'd just have to repeat it until he understood.

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It was three months later that they sat together, sipping saffron tea while overlooking the Iranian dessert to celebrate. The restaurant was closed for the night. The revealing of the new private rooms was an astounding success, if the guests and the evening edition of the *Prophet* were anything to go by. It was a memorable and unique experience for both of them, working on the portal rooms together, perfecting the menus and the new dynamic of their growing relationship.

As the sun was setting, the breeze was cool. The sun reflected in a haze off the sand and, of course, the purple flowers below. The flowers would be opening in the dawn light, purple petals bursting forth rusty red stamens that would eventually end up in their restaurant. There was a peace that settled between them, knowing that the cycle would complete itself, and that this is what they had to look forward to, together.

END OF STORY

AN: Thank you for reading! If you'd like to see or try any of the recipes, visit my LiveJournal ([jinxie4](#)) to link to the original posting. At the end of the story, you can find all the recipes to fill your food pron delights!

Original Prompt: Five or ten years post-war, Severus is Head Chef at his own (wildly popular) restaurant. He hires Hermione to manage the place so he can focus on CREATING wonderful food. He falls for Hermione and woos her with food, drink and exquisite settings. Describe them. (Yes, I have been watching too much Food Network!)