

Better Late Than Never

by Pearle

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Summary: Looks can be deceiving. Not everyone and everything is always as they appear. A really late answer to the WIKTT challenge: 2 to 6 from 2003.

Disclaimer: The characters, settings, etc., of the Harry Potter series are not mine; they belong to J.K. Rowling and Co. I promise to return them when I am through. Well, most of them anyway.

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A scream rent the silent night air, startling the young lady in the Head Girl's room awake. Eyes rapidly scanning the room, she searched for the source of the banshee howl. Seeing nothing moving within the room, she gently nudged her companion. Screams in the night were not unusual at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry...what with the large population of ghosts and other fantastical beings...but something about this one made her tremble with fear. The one sharing her bed was still sound asleep. He made a sound very much like a sigh and shifted position, but other than that showed no signs of stirring.

"Wake up!" Hermione Granger said, poking more firmly.

His eyes finally opened, and he opened his mouth as if to speak ...

"Come on, you need to get up," she said, cutting off his tirade before it could begin.

Severus snarled. "It's the middle of the night. Turn off the bloody alarm and let me sleep."

"It's not my alarm. I think there might be a banshee loose in the castle." Hermione tied her wrapper shut, preparing to search the castle for the source of the sound.

"And you want me to do what? I'm sure everything is fine. Minerva would have contacted you by now if she needed us." As if on cue, the Floo roared to life.

"Attention, I need the Heads of House and any available faculty to the front entrance immediately. Someone has let a rogue banshee loose on the school grounds. Please advise your students to stay in their common rooms with their prefects."

"Severus, you have to go. I don't want Rose or Hugo to see you here."

"I understand that. If we'd stayed in my chambers as I wanted, you wouldn't have to be worried about them seeing me." With a grimace, Severus looked around the Head

Girl's room. "When are your chambers going to be repaired? I'd rather not sleep with you in one of the student rooms again."

"Minerva said they should have the plumbing fixed by Monday. You need to take the Floo to your quarters, and we both need to hurry down to the entrance hall. Let's go."

Begrudgingly, Severus got up. "Fine, throw me out. In any event, it seems I have a date with a banshee to attend to." He stopped to retrieve his trousers, balancing on one foot then the other as he slid them on over black silk boxers. "I understand you want to protect your children, but don't you think it's time we told them about us? I would like to take you out to dinner. Take a trip together. Perhaps spend a week or two along the coast. Have the children join us at some point, if you like." He casually rubbed one hand across his face, wiping the sleep from his eyes as he watched Hermione struggle to answer his query.

"I know you've been patient. I'll tell them after school is out, I promise. It's just that Ron made such a mess of things. The divorce..."

A knock at her chamber doors interrupted the conversation. "Mum? Mum, are you there? What was that?"

Hermione glared at Severus as he swept over to the fireplace and disappeared in a flash of green light. Taking a deep breath she opened the door and greeted her children. "Rose, Hugo, what are you doing out of bed at this time of night?"

Another scream, louder than before, was heard.

"What is that?"

"That, Mr Weasley, Miss Weasley, is a banshee." Silently, Severus had appeared behind the trio. "Ms Granger, have you not instructed your Gryffindors to remain in their common room? I believe Minerva is waiting." Without pause, Severus swept forward and down the stairway.

"Go back to your common room. I'm sure everything is fine." Annoyed, Hermione quickly turned and headed for the front entrance.

Hugo watched his mother's retreating form. "Why do you think they keep pretending they're not together?"

Rose shrugged. "I don't know. Maybe Mum is worried we'll get upset. You'd think Hogwarts' Charms Mistress would remember to cast a silencing charm on her room if she didn't want us to hear them talking."

"Well, she's not in her regular rooms, is she? You, me, Mum, and Professor Snape at the beach. Do you think he actually takes off that cape? Do you think he'll even talk to us?" Shaking his head questioningly, Hugo and Rose turned and headed back toward their common room.

"I was going to stop last night and remind Mum that Uncle Harry was going to pick us up later today when he came for James, Albus, and Lily. Remember? She said we could stay over at the Burrow tonight and come back to the castle with her tomorrow after Granddad's birthday party."

Hugo stopped to look at his sister. "So?"

"So, just as I was about to knock on the door, I heard her laughing. Really laughing. She sounded happier than I've heard her since before Da, well, you know. And that's not all. I heard Professor Snape laughing. At least, I think it was him...I've never heard him laugh before, so I'm not really sure it was him, but it was a really deep male voice. I didn't stick around to find out for sure. The thing is, I think they make each other happy." Rose shook her head. "I don't know. Did you notice he didn't take any points off of us for being out of bed?"

"Wow, must be love."

Rose slugged her brother in the shoulder. "Very funny. Come on, I don't want to be found in the hall by either Mum or Professor Snape." They reached the fat lady's portrait and disappeared through the portrait hole just as another scream was heard.

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Tired, their robes sodden from treading through the damp Scottish night, it was a dispirited band of witches and wizards who headed back up to the castle more than an hour after the first "banshee" scream was heard. The "banshee" turned out to be two old hags who had been hit with a voice-altering hex and lost their way after consuming a bottle of firewhisky. The pair was found stumbling up the path from Hogsmeade reminiscing on old times after having a disillusion spell cast on them. Each cackle came out as a air-wrenching scream, causing the pair to laugh even harder and cackle even more. After, treating and reversing the spells, Hagrid and Professor Flitwick volunteered to see the pair safely back home.

Reaching the entrance hall, Minerva thanked everyone for their efforts as each of the instructors headed off to their rooms. Slowly climbing the main stairway, Hermione stopped for a minute to adjust her boots. Noticing no one left in the entrance hall, she turned and sprinted for the side entrance to dungeons only to be caught by Severus who had been hiding in the shadows.

"Going somewhere?"

"I was looking for you," she said with a smile.

"And you found me. I assume you agree my chambers are a much better trysting place than the Head Girl's room?"

"Definitely."

"Do you need to check the Gryffindor common room first?" The pair ducked into an open doorway, a faculty shortcut that opened into the hallway outside Severus' chamber.

"It's after four. I'm sure they're all asleep."

Entering through the portrait hole and passing through the darkened sitting room, Severus lit the fireplace in his bedroom. It took but a few spells for the bed to be turned down and the pair to be dressed for sleep. Once in bed, Severus gently spooned up against Hermione's back, softly stroking her arm as he held her. Sighing quietly, he placed a soft kiss on her shoulder. "Night, sleep well."

"Severus ..."

"Hmm?"

"Why don't you come with me to Arthur's birthday party tomorrow?"

Severus froze, her question having far reaching consequences for the two of them. "You want me to attend the party?"

"Well, you are invited...all the Order members are invited...but I thought we could go together."

"Hermione, isn't that 'jumping in with both feet?' Everyone will see us together. Shouldn't we take it a bit slower?"

"Why?" Hermione turned to face him. "You know most everyone there. I know you like Arthur. Ron and whatever bimbo he's taken up with will be there. And I really want to go with you."

"And Rose and Hugo?"

"Honestly? We've been together for six months. I think they'll be fine with it. After all their father has put them through this last year, I don't think you and I will be a problem for them."

Sweeping an unruly length of hair behind her ear, Severus stroked Hermione's cheek. "Do you know what you're saying?"

"Yeah, I do. It's time to start living my life." Throwing her arm over his waist and her leg over his, Hermione closed her eyes. "Get some sleep."

Severus couldn't help the grin that spread across his face. "I love you."

Hermione yawned. "Mmm, I love you, too. Sleep...I have breakfast duty in three hours."

The only sound in the quiet room was the crackling of the fire as sleep overtook the two in the bed.

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A/N: As the title says, better late than never. A really late response to the 2 to 6 challenge on WIKTT. The challenge ended August 17, 2003, so I'm about nine years late in answering it (or eight years, 9 months, and 29 days to be exact). Can't say why it struck me now, but well ... here it is. Canon compliant through *that* epilogue mostly, then off into my own world where Severus lived and Hermione and Ron are divorced.

A grateful thank-you to Shug for her support, her time, her general enthusiasm for Dances and all my work, and for beta'ing this story for me. Thank you for stepping outside of your busy life to help me. I truly appreciate your help and your friendship.

And yes, Dances is still in the works, this just seemed to get in my way first.

Pearle

Chicago 2012

Challenge requirements:

All stories must begin and end with the paragraphs below.

All stories must feature Hermione Granger and Severus Snape in some manner.

Stories should be complete and should not exceed 2,000 words (about 6/7 pages) .

Stories must take place between the hours of 2:00 a.m. and 6:00 a.m.

Use only one of the following in the story:

Lucius Malfoy

Mrs. Norris

Fred Weasley

Voldemort

Neville Longbottom

(All other characters other than this list of five are fair game)

Mention at least one of these fanon creations/mainstays:

Dark Revel(s)

Contraceptive Charm

Snape or Hermione's personal scent

Ars Alchemica

Wizard's Weekly

Black Silk Boxers

The story must start with:

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And must end with:

Sleep overtook the two in the bed.