

Forsaken

by herbologist

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First Class

Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: It goes without saying of course, but I do not claim to own any of the Harry Potter characters or their magical universe created by J.K. Rowling. I'm writing this story purely for fun and not for profit.

A/N:

I have been trying to resist starting a new story until I finish Avada Kedavra, but this one walked into my head and has been far more tempting to write lately than anything else. So I gave in...

I thought I had written all I could on this pairing with Beyond Captivation. I thought I would never ever (ever!) write anything even remotely resembling a marriage law fic. Obviously, I was wrong. I can't promise frequent updates (I still am trying to finish Avada Kedavra...), but I'm not someone who easily abandons a project either. So I'm putting this out there. Do let me know if it piques your curiosity and you want me to write more.

There it was again, the pain. It had a tendency to attack him at the most inopportune times. Professor Snape (yes, he was a professor once more) braced himself with one hand against the frame of the classroom door he had been about to enter, his other hand leaning on his cane for support. He closed his eyes and let the firestorm engulf him. It was his own private hell, but he could bear it.

After the first wave had subsided, he leaned with his back against the wall, resting his cane against the doorframe so that he had both hands free. It now took two hands to perform even the simplest task. He reached into the pocket of his teaching robes, clumsily fumbling around until he managed to extract a small potions bottle. Holding it up to his face with shaking hands, it took all his concentration and what seemed like an eternity to remove the stopper and to bring the bottle to his lips. Once the metallic taste of the potion filled his mouth, he knew he would be safe from another wave of pain, at least for the next few hours.

It was ironic that his damaged nerves were still capable of giving him such agony when all of their useful functions were greatly diminished, leaving him little sensation and control over his extremities and the dexterity of a mountain troll. He succeeded in replacing the bottle securely in his pocket, but as he tried to pull his hand back out, his arm gave a jerk, knocking over his cane, which fell to the floor with a clatter. His heart sank. He had no idea how he was going to retrieve it. He didn't dare to get down. His treacherous legs couldn't be trusted to get him up again, especially not if he failed to reach the cane. And there was no point in trying to Summon it, as he could barely

perform the wand movements of even the simplest spells. He hated his body. Feeling totally helpless, he was acutely aware of the seconds trickling by. He was already late for his first class on his first day of work.

Suddenly, he heard footsteps approaching along the corridor. Standing there, immobile and upright, he was torn between relief and fear of humiliation. A few moments later, one of the nurses turned around the corner. He immediately recognised her. He knew them all. They had looked after him for the best part of a year, after he had been found barely alive on the floor of the Shrieking Shack. And she apparently remembered him, too. Understanding straight away the predicament he was in, she stopped, picked up his cane, and placed the knob in his hand with a reassuring squeeze.

"There you are, Professor Snape. Have a lovely day," she chirped with a beaming smile before she hurried on to wherever her assistance was required. She knew better than to expect a word of thanks from him.

It was a remarkable turn of fate that he should be back here at St Mungo's so soon after being discharged, but he refused to call it luck. People kept telling him how lucky he was lucky to be alive, lucky that he had not suffered any brain damage, lucky that he recovered the use of his voice, lucky to be offered such a good job... Yet he didn't feel lucky at all. He had not wanted this life: the life of a cripple, stripped of most of his magic, his manhood, and his dignity, with nothing left but an overactive mind imprisoned in a broken body, his tortured pride, and his pain.

The job was, of course, a good thing, as it provided him with the means to support himself. He was no longer capable of doing apothecary work. His hands, which had once been able to slice asphodel root with astonishing speed and precision, now couldn't even decant a potion without spilling everything. A teaching position was unfortunately his only option.

Minerva had, of course, asked him to come back in an advisory function, as she had called it, because all teaching positions were already filled. But he didn't want any special provisions to be made for him, especially not as he sensed that they were motivated by an uncomfortable mix of guilt, gratitude and pity. He met this type of sentiment whenever he talked to one of his former colleagues, and therefore, staying at Hogwarts would have felt rather awkward. So it had been a good thing that St Mungo's wanted him to teach the Potions module of its prestigious trainee programme. They even valued his knowledge and expertise enough to accommodate his "special needs", assigning him a secretary to help with his marking, and had been quick to point out that should he require medical assistance, he would be in the right place.

He was determined though to not call on the services of a Healer ever again. He had already been poked and prodded and subjected to more humiliation than any person could reasonably be expected to bear. In any case, they had made it clear that there was nothing more they could do for him. According to them, it was a small miracle that he had recuperated thus far; this was as good as he would get. The snake venom had poisoned his peripheral nerves. Not surprisingly, those parts of his body with the highest nerve density seemed to be the worst affected, namely his hands, his feet, but also the part of his anatomy that every man values most highly, and which in his case was left dead and limp, with no other use than to direct the stream of his urine. They had told him that the damage was permanent. All they could do now was to give him potions to manage the pain.

But he had no time now to wallow in self-pity. Inside the classroom, his students were waiting. These were not incompetent first-years. They were NEWT graduates, the best and brightest of their class, the ones who had beaten fierce competition to secure one of only six traineeships. Their expectations would be justifiably high. For a moment, he was plagued by a flush of apprehension. He would not be able to demonstrate any techniques or even write on the board. Would his teaching be adequate? But then he brushed those thoughts aside, put on his most authoritative face, and pushed the door open.

Meanwhile, inside the classroom, as the hands of the clock above the door moved past nine o'clock, the initial tense silence started to be broken by an occasional nervous rustle of paper or a hushed whisper. Where was their professor?

Hermione Granger allowed her eyes to wander, observing the other young people sat at their benches. There was Cho Chang, whom she knew and liked well, and who gave her a smile when their eyes met. There also was Richard Rowan, Cho's lab partner and boy-friend from Ravenclaw, a girl wearing a blue Beauxbatons jumper, and a handsome young man she hadn't seen before.

But her heart sank when she spotted Patricia Parseley from Slytherin. She had made her acquaintance when she returned to Hogwarts to finish her NEWTs, joining the year below her. As usual, the Gryffindors and Slytherins had Potions classes together, and during every single one of them, it seemed that Patricia considered herself in a competition with Hermione over who brewed the better potion or got the higher mark for their essay. Hermione, though she always worked extremely hard to do her best, couldn't relate to that sort of ambition at all and found it quite wearing, especially as Patricia wouldn't hesitate to turn her charms on Professor Slughorn and do all she could to undermine her. She sighed inwardly. Only the two best students would be offered a permanent position as Healers of St Mungo's at the end of the programme, so inevitably, the spirit of the class would be highly competitive. Having Patricia there could only make things worse. The stakes were high. Hermione, too, knew she absolutely had to secure one of the two healerships, not least because her financial situation was so desperate.

Hermione's parents had been very well off. Money had never been an issue during her childhood. But now that their stately family home had been sold, her mum and dad having emigrated to Australia, unaware that they even had a daughter, all she had to fall back on was the modest award that had come with her Order of Merlin. After she had broken up with Ron, living at the Burrow had felt too awkward, and moving in with Harry and Ginny would have been hardly better. So she had decided to get a place of her own. But she had been in for a rough awakening when she found out how expensive rents had become in post-war wizarding London. In the end, she'd had to settle for a dingy room in an unsavoury part of Knockturn Alley. Her landlady, Madam Pussfoot, an unpleasant middle-aged woman, had told her that there would be a surcharge for every night she brought a visitor to her room. Hermione suspected that the other tenants were probably prostitutes. But she had to eat as well as buy stationery and a new robe, and this had been by far the cheapest option. She had told herself that she would spend little time there anyway, being occupied with classes all day.

It was not for nothing that St Mungo's trainee programme was so highly regarded. It also had the reputation of being truly gruelling. Each day they would have eight hours of classes: two hours of Healing Potions first thing in the morning, followed by Diagnostic Spells, and in the afternoon, Magical Maladies and Therapeutic Charms. In addition, there would be homework assignments for the week-end and required extra reading. For the next thirteen months, she would have little time for anything other than study.

Suddenly, the classroom door flew open. Six pairs of eyes stared at the tall, dark figure in the doorway, who was to be their professor. Hermione spent a moment in shock. It was Professor Snape. She had had no idea that he would be teaching them. A feeling of stabbing guilt made her insides twist uncomfortably. She had felt awful when she heard that he had been found still alive. She and her friends had been present when he was attacked by the snake, but they had believed him dead and beyond help, leaving him behind on the floor of the Shrieking Shack. With hindsight, such presumption seemed unforgivable.

He looked in bad shape. He was barely able to stand unaided, leaning heavily on a cane for support, yet he held his head high. He made his way over to his desk with small, laboured steps, stiffly taking his seat at the front of the classroom. There seemed to be a twitch to his hands, which he folded in front of him on the desk, as if to better control them. His hair appeared unkempt. His face, which in the past had always been clean shaven, now looked like he had a bit of a stubble. Hermione was shocked by how changed he was from the former Hogwarts professor, who had stalked about with the silence and speed of a jaguar, so that he often seemed to Apparate out of nowhere, gracefully pivoting on the spot to turn his attention on a misbehaving student or aiming a vanishing spell across the classroom with breathtaking precision.

The look from his black eyes as he scanned the room, however, was as searing and intimidating as it had always been. Hermione shrunk in her chair when she met his glare. It seemed that his features darkened even further when he set his eyes on her person. And no wonder. If they had not left him to die, if only they had called for help promptly, he might have made a full recovery. He had every reason to despise her.

"For those of you who do not know me, I am Professor Severus Snape, and I am here to instruct you in the high art of Healing Potions."

His voice, too, was still the same. Deep and resonant, it washed over her, bringing back memories of Hogwarts, of times which, though always under the threat of danger, now somehow seemed altogether happier.

"That you all have the ability for academic study is beyond question, or you would not be here. But whether you possess the tenacity and diligence required to complete

this programme... remains to be seen."

The silence in the room when he paused was absolute. It seemed that his students hardly dared to breathe, as the strange, broken man at the front desk still managed to command their undivided attention.

"There are over two hundred standard potions on the curriculum, in addition to the creation of specific antidotes and tailor-made remedies. This means that you only have one lesson to master each potion. It also means that, regrettably, we have little time to dedicate to theory. You will be given a homework assignment for the week-end to explore a theoretical topic in depth. Essays are to be no less than five feet of parchment..." There was a suppressed groan from behind her, which caused Snape to raise one eyebrow as he continued, "... and to be handed in on Monday morning. I will then discuss the topic in class on Wednesday."

"You are aspiring to be Healers, masters over health and illness, over life and death. You are no doubt aware of the responsibility that comes with this art. As such, in this classroom, I will tolerate no lack of preparation, no carelessness, and no mistakes."

"With regards to your practical work in class, there will be two simple rules. Firstly, if you fail to produce a perfect sample within the time you have each morning, you will stay behind in the evening to repeat your efforts, and you will not leave the premises until you have succeeded. Secondly, you will be required to taste your own potion at the end of each class. This way you will learn to assert the quality of a potion by its taste and smell. If, through your own carelessness or incompetence, you produce something harmful, you will suffer the consequences, as would your patients. Have I made myself understood or do you require further clarification?"

His answer was only stunned silence.

"Good. Your task today is Feverfew Draught. You may start when you're ready."

Still, nobody moved. After several moments of silence, the Beauxbatons girl tentatively raised her hand.

"Sir... "

"Yes, Miss -?"

"LaRoche, Virginie LaRoche. Sir, you `ave not given us instructions."

"Bartram's Reference for the Healing Arts, page five hundred and ninety-four."

Virginie's blue eyes were brimming with tears now. "But, we were not told to bring zis book to class, Sir. Can you not write the instructions on the board, please?"

Hermione rummaged around in her handbag with the undetectable extension charm and pulled out her copy of Bartram's. Fortunately, she carried her entire book collection with her all the time. She turned to her distraught classmate.

"Here, I have a copy. We can share."

A quick look around the classroom showed her that she was the only one in possession of the book. Patricia shot her a glance of pure hatred. Sharing one book amongst all six of them was hardly practical.

"Professor Snape, only on this occasion, would you allow me to read out the instructions for the others to take notes?"

He conceded her request with a small nod. She read out the list of ingredients while her classmates scribbled away. By the time she had finished, they had lost over fifteen minutes, and had to hurry up with the preparation of the draught. Thankfully, it was a relatively simple potion, and everybody managed to finish before the bell signalled the end of the lesson. Hermione tasted a small spoonful of her potion. She was satisfied with her work. It had a distinctive acrid taste and a pronounced cooling effect. The latter was not unwelcome, as she had felt rather flushed after an hour of hurried brewing, bent over a hot, steaming cauldron.

"Miss Chang and Mr. Rowan, your potions are inadequate. You copied from each other and thereby made the same mistake. Have a taste of Miss Granger's potion so you'll understand the difference. You will have to repeat the exercise after the end of your afternoon classes. I'll expect you to hand in a good sample tomorrow morning."

"Tough luck," whispered Cho when she came over for a spoonful of Hermione's potion. "But, at least my potion wasn't poisonous, just ineffective. And could I maybe borrow your book until tomorrow morning? I fear Rowan and I might have to spend the night here otherwise."

"Of course you can. Here."

Hermione took extra time to clear up her desk. She wanted to have a quick word with Professor Snape once the others had left. She would probably never be able to look him in the eye again, but perhaps telling him how sorry she was would go some way towards assuaging his rancour towards her.

Snape sat immobile at his desk, watching the hasty activity with an air of indifference. She hung back until the last of her classmates had escaped through door. When she stopped in front of him, he stared her down with impatient ire.

"What is it, Miss Granger?" he asked harshly.

"Sir, I just wanted to say how deeply sorry I am for not helping you the night of the final battle. We honestly had no idea that you were still alive. And if it's any good to you, I will never forgive myself for that misjudgement."

"Get. Out." Two words were all she got in response. His eyes were burning with cold fury, his voice low and dangerous.

"I will... I'm sorry, sir. I'm so sorry..." she stuttered.

"Out!"

As she fled from the classroom, she knew that her apology had almost certainly made matters worse.

A/N: Reviews are my only reward. Please give generously!