

# Darned

by Minerva

An attack on Madam Pince leads to startling revelations for Hermione Granger.

## One shot

Chapter 1 of 1

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*Author's note: I wrote this even before HBP, therefore it is hopelessly AU. No copyright-infringement intended, everyone and everything recognisable belongs to J.K.Rowling. Many thanks to my beta, Dreamy\_Dragon. This story is dedicated to feisanna, who was the 100th reviewer of Bad Hair Day.*

Part of her conscience made her feel ashamed for the first thought that had entered her mind upon hearing about the attack on Madam Pince why would Death Eaters attack someone so unimportant?

Therefore, Hermione Granger tried to make up for her lack of compassion by visiting the sour librarian in the hospital wing. Madam Pince lay unconscious and would likely remain so for some time. Poppy had voiced her surprise that she had survived these particular curses at all and had taken down three opponents to boot. Obviously, the librarian was a far stronger witch than anyone had given her credit for. Well, perhaps not anyone, for Hermione had noticed the unusually grave face of Albus Dumbledore when he had announced the news. There was more to this than met the eye.

Hogwarts' matron thought nothing of Hermione visiting Madam Pince; after all, the girl seemed to be the one pupil who spent as much time in the library as Severus Snape had done during his schooldays.

Poppy suggested to Hermione either to read to the patient or to just talk to her. Not sure what to read, the young woman had looked over the librarian's desk. There she had found a book, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, tucked into a basket full of black socks waiting to be darned. Hermione remembered noticing Madam Pince doing something with her hands during those long hours in the library, but had never bothered to find out what exactly it was.

After reading from the rather depressing book for two hours, Hermione decided to just talk to Madam Pince next time.

Two days later she noticed no improvement in Madam Pince despite the numerous potions bottles on her bedside table. Curious, she leaned closer, studying the labels written in Snape's spidery script. Some of the draughts were very advanced and complicated to brew, with no shelf life at all. Snape must have worked through the last two nights, which would explain his absolutely beastly behaviour in class today.

Hermione let her mind wander. In retrospect, she should have seen it. Implacable as he appeared, the Order's spy was nearing the end of his tether. Snape was no longer lean but much too thin. He could not even rein in his temper in the presence of Dumbledore and McGonagall.

Hermione knew that Voldemort would attack soon because some weeks earlier Snape had confirmed that the last battle would take place at Hogwarts before Harry Potter's last school day. N.E.W.T.s were only eight weeks away, and studying for them had taken her mind off that, but now she grew really frightened for the first time. Hermione realised how much she depended on Snape. He was reliably vicious, but there every time they were in real danger. If Snape was crumbling, then the side of the Light was in deep trouble.

Casting a silencing spell, she began to make one-sided small talk to the unconscious librarian, trying hard not to come back to her worries about Snape too often. Wanting

to occupy her hands, her eyes fell on the basket she'd brought from the library. Hermione's grandmother had taught her how to darn socks, so she gave it a try.

She wondered whose socks Madam Pince was mending. They couldn't be her own. Hermione had never seen her in anything but sensible brown woollen tights. And surely they weren't Dumbledore's, being all black.

Nearly half a week went by before Hermione had time again for a visit to the infirmary homework, head girl duties, and research for the Horcruxes, hadn't permitted her to come earlier.

Now, after her last round through the castle, it was nearly midnight. She noticed stronger than usual wards guarding the entrance to the hospital wing, but obviously they were tuned to admit her because Poppy could still be heard snoring softly; no alarms had been triggered by her entering.

Rounding the corner, Hermione saw that the librarian already had a visitor. The Potions master was sitting on a chair next to the bed. Hermione was about to greet him when she noticed he'd fallen asleep. She took the time to study him. His usually meticulously kept robes were in a state of disarray, and the lines in his face seemed to have deepened during the last few days. Nearly imperceptible twitches of his limbs told Hermione of the long term after-effects of prolonged torture under Cruciatus.

The man deserved his sleep.

Hermione pondered whether to transfigure his chair to make him more comfortable but decided against it for fear of waking him. Taking a last look at the patient, who seemed slightly improved, she left for her dormitory.

Even a long bath didn't help Hermione sleep. At half past four she rose again. Curled up in the window seat, watching the sunrise, she did some serious thinking. The events of last night replayed themselves in her mind. Snippets of two images Snape's exhausted face, his head falling sideways in the chair, and the librarian's angular features against the white sheets finally led her to the right conclusion. Now she knew why Albus Dumbledore trusted Snape unconditionally, why Madam Pince was mending Snape's socks and from whom the Potions Master had inherited his love of books.

This was dangerous knowledge indeed! Should Voldemort find out, Snape's life would be forfeit. The Dark Lord would know where his true loyalties lay. Hermione had only one course of action, really. She waited until half past six and then made her way down to the dungeons to Snape's quarters. A short detour to the infirmary had provided her with the one item that would grant her entrance.

Snape opened mere moments after her knock, fully clothed.

"Miss Granger?"

"Good morning, sir. I have something to tell you. May I come in?"

"Come in? Have you lost your mind?"

Hermione reached into her pocket and withdrew a pair of socks.

"I'll talk to you wherever you want, sir, but please hear me out in a less public place."

He opened the door wider and let her slip in, immediately resetting the wards. The Potions master gestured towards two chairs in front of the hearth. Hermione perched on the edge of hers.

"Sir, I've realised who Madam Pince is. If I should be taken by Death Eaters or slipped Veritaserum, that would put you in great danger should V... ah, the Dark Lord learn of it. I've come here for you to Oblivate me or to put all memories since the attack in a Pensieve."

Snape was visibly surprised.

"Miss Granger, I trust you are aware of the dangers of botched-up memory spells? That could mean no N.E.W.T.s, no apprenticeship for you."

"Yes, of course I know about the possible implications. But I am confident that you would not *botch up* the spell."

"Quite reckless of you. But not necessary. The Dark Lord has already discovered my true allegiance, hence the attack on my mother."

"I am sorry, sir. I do hope she will make a full recovery."

"In time she will."

"Good. Good morning, sir."

With that she rose to leave.

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The final battle came five weeks later. Madam Pince or Mrs Snape, rather was fully recovered by then and stood next to her son during the Death Eater attack. Together with Dumbledore, Hermione and Ron, they built a phalanx around Harry Potter until he got his chance with Voldemort. Draco Malfoy, the remaining spy for the Order, had destroyed the last Horcrux Nagini seconds after Voldemort had Apparated onto the battlefield. The evil wizard vanished in a cloud of smoke after Harry's last curse, and the war was won.

At the start of the next term, Severus Snape was the butt of a lot of jokes when Dumbledore announced the new DADA teacher Mrs Snape. As there was no war looming, only a reduced curriculum had to be taught, thus leaving her enough time to still run the library. Snape bore the teasing with good will - to the amazement of all but Professor Flitwick's Charms apprentice.

Five years later, said apprentice had taken over from the retired Charms professor. Mrs Snape announced that she didn't want to watch books any longer but wanted to watch grandchildren instead.

The Potions master choked on his morning coffee, and the Charms mistress paled visibly. They had worked on some projects together, had made a habit of herb gathering excursions in the Forbidden Forest together, spent a lot of evenings reading together in either quarters and even volunteered to chaperone Hogsmeade weekends together but nothing more. To the utter frustration of Albus Dumbledore and Eileen Snape. Before they could do something about it however, fate intervened.

One Tuesday morning, during the second period, a mighty boom shook the foundations of the castle. Hermione Granger frowned for a moment, then paled, dismissed her third year Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw charms class and broke into a run. As Monday afternoons and Tuesday mornings were free of lessons, the Potions master often conducted his experiments during this time. An explosion of that force... Hermione's heart constricted as she calculated the implications. Would it be too late? True, it had taken both of them years to make the transition from student and teacher to colleagues, but Hermione at least had been ready for more for quite some time. Unfortunately, her vaunted Gryffindor bravery had left her completely where Severus was concerned.

The classroom door had been blown off its hinges. With ingrained caution she'd had a very thorough and strict potions teacher in her school days she sniffed the air. It seemed safe enough to enter. Somewhere in Hermione's mind the thought registered that there would be blood if Severus had been blown to smithereens, but she also knew that there were more ways to be killed by a potion than the Muggle way.

Snape was nowhere in sight, but the room was completely destroyed, splintered wood strewn everywhere and shrapnel-sharp pieces of cauldrons stuck in the walls. Hermione made her way towards the store room, hoping that he had sought cover there, when she saw a pale hand sticking out from under the overturned teacher's desk.

Slowly levitating the heavy oak table away, she found a body attached to the hand.

At a first glance he appeared to be relatively unhurt. Carefully, Hermione cast some diagnostic spells, and to her utter relief, they showed only some abrasions and a concussion. But then, she was no Healer; Poppy Pomfrey had to see Severus soon.

Still mindful of potentially harmful fumes, she levitated his unconscious form outside and started to make her way up to the hospital wing. The first people she met on her way were Madam Snape and Albus Dumbledore, both worrying greatly. The DADA teacher accompanied Hermione to the infirmary while the Headmaster continued his way down to the dungeon to assess the destruction and possibly begin repairs.

Hermione tried very hard to stay focused on the Mobilicorpus because every time she didn't, panic began to rise in her chest. Poppy was already waiting. Some tense minutes passed until she confirmed Hermione's first diagnosis. The Charms professor couldn't help a sigh of profound relief. She didn't realise the mediwitch was addressing her after healing some minor cuts and bruises.

"Sorry, Poppy, I was, ah..."

"I was saying that the hospital wing is full of children with dragon pox, and Severus never liked staying here anyway could you two watch him for twelve hours, just to be on the safe side? After that he should be as good as new."

"Of course," both Mrs Snape and Hermione chorused. The librarian had already started to float her son's stretcher when Poppy called after them.

"Put him into the nearest bed available; his headache and nausea will be worse the farther he is moved."

Hermione thought she detected a satisfied smirk on the DADA teacher's lips as she stated, "That would be Gryffindor Tower then, Professor Granger, wouldn't it?"

Hermione only nodded, still too much affected by her own feelings to bother much.

Mrs Snape offered to watch Severus during Hermione's afternoon lessons.

She assigned reading and revision in her class as she tried to calm down. She liked Snape a lot. She even might have called her emotions towards the man more than mere liking had she ever permitted herself to think in that direction. He was the castle's only inhabitant with whom she felt completely at ease; who, she felt, accepted her as she was; who understood her love of academics, her zeal.

She had refrained from pursuing a more intimate relationship with him for mainly two reasons. First, she did not think he would welcome her overtures, and second, she was too afraid of losing his friendship. But today's accident had brought clarity to her mind. Hermione knew now that she wouldn't have simply mourned a friend and esteemed colleague had he died today. During those minutes before she had ascertained that he would be all right, she had felt worse than ever before.

She would come clean and tell him of her feelings. And if he rejected her, so be it, but she would no longer deny the two of them the possibilities that lay ahead if he felt remotely the same.

Hermione had to keep herself from running after her last lesson. Mrs Snape had settled her son into her bed and had exchanged his tattered robes for soft grey pyjamas.

"He has not awoken yet, but I think he's simply sleeping now, no longer unconscious. I'll go to the library will you call me if anything changes?"

"Of course."

After setting a small charm to alert her should he wake, Hermione showered and changed then settled into a chair next to the bed with a book. She didn't read a word though, content with watching Severus sleep. His face looked relaxed, the creases softened. It had taken two years after the fall of Voldemort, but now the changes in Hogwarts' sarcastic bastard of a Potions master were impossible to miss.

No amount of time could erase the stress of two decades of living as a double agent, but he had begun to treat students almost fairly. He had been seen joking, laughing even, with colleagues, elder Slytherins and advanced Potions students and had introduced football, a Muggle sport, to Hogwarts, training the school's inter-house team himself. That had earned him some Howlers from pure-blood parents, but the rest of the wizarding world had cheered with the team when they came third in a Scottish school tournament.

Hermione did not notice that tears were running down her face until he opened his eyes.

"Hermione?"

Severus seemed mildly disorientated but otherwise well.

"Hey there. The infirmary is full of children with dragon pox. Therefore, Poppy suggested that you sleep off your concussion elsewhere. Gryffindor Tower was closest."

"Ah, I see. Then why are you crying?"

He had taken her hand with these words, and Hermione had a feeling that he knew exactly why. But then, between a Gryffindor and a Slytherin, could she really expect him to be the forthright one?

Hermione put her other hand on top of his and summoned her courage. "Severus, when I heard that explosion and realised what it might mean I, ah, I realised how much it would matter to me, had something dreadful happened to you. No, that's wrong. I have realised quite some time ago what you mean to me, but I knew only then that I had to tell you even if you do not feel the same."

"Why would I do that?"

"Stop making this difficult for me! If you weren't concussed I would hit you over the head."

"Shush, you become even more beautiful when you're angry, and I am I no state at the moment to appreciate that."

"Insufferable man." A suddenly giddy Hermione leaned closer until his face was mere inches away.

"You only said that to make me prove you wrong, didn't you?"

Without answering she closed the distance and tentatively met his lips. They were surprisingly soft and pliant. A small but effective tug on her sleeve had her lying next to him while their contact didn't break. Severus wrapped his arms around her. Hermione looked at him questioningly.

"Just stay, please."

She did just that, for the next 117 years.

The End

