

Love in Silence

by Meladara

For years he had watched her, listened to her and, most of all, loved her in silence.
This Christmas that will change.

Chapter One

Chapter 1 of 1

For years he had watched her, listened to her and, most of all, loved her in silence. This Christmas that will change.

The characters and canon situations in the following story belong solely to JK Rowling, Scholastic and WB. The lyrics to the song 'I Loved You Once in Silence' from the musical Camelot were written by Alan Jay Lerner. I am not making any money from the publishing or writing of this story.

It was the music that had initially drawn him to her at that much-loathed holiday gathering six years earlier. If he recalled correctly, Albus had bribed him into attending that year. He had gone with the same expectations that he had held for the previous 22 years of his tenure at Hogwarts.

Sitting in his usual chair, that long past Christmas, with drink in hand, he had watched on as she had been asked to play by Minerva. Even now he could remember how her face had momentarily flashed with panic and then embarrassment. She had politely declined but had been drilled by an insistent Minerva. When eventually her resolve had been worn down, and she had finally relented, her approach toward the piano bench had been filled with obvious reluctance. The nervousness had been clear on her face as he had watched, and he'd been amused and hopeful that for once he might actually find some entertainment at one of these dreadful gatherings. He had held that hope until she had begun to play.

It had been only the matter of an instant, when her fingers had pressed the keys and music had invaded the room, that he had felt an odd catch in his chest, a drumming in his being that held him in place as she had played. He had watched as her nervousness had faded into passion, a passion that she had coaxed from the piano in the form of intricate and delicate song. Involuntarily he had found himself surprised and impressed. The haunting melodies that she had drawn from the piano had spoken straight to his soul and entranced him from that very first note. And from that moment on, each gathering was always the same. She and her music held the rare capability to ensnare him each and every time.

It was clear to him that she had no idea how alluring he found her and her music. At every staff party, without fail, she would appear completely embarrassed that she had been asked to play yet again. Then, as she sat at the piano before playing, he would watch her take deep calming breaths. The slight nervous shake to her hands and the blush in her cheeks were her only tells. Her eyes would alight across the room, as if looking for reassurance that her playing was truly desired. He wondered at this. Could she truly believe that those in the room did not enjoy or desire her music? Anyone who cared to take notice could tell that music was the passion of her life, despite how hesitant she was to share it. Perhaps that was the true magic of her, that this woman, so beautiful and stern, could show such passion.

To most she was a bookworm and well known know-it-all, whose thirst for knowledge was nearly unquenchable. As a professor she was known for her ability to run a classroom with an iron fist, never brooking any nonsense, and over the years the students had learned not to cross her.

But with each passing year, each party of shy, entrancing music, she became so much more to the lonely man who sat in the chair tucked in the dark corner. She would approach the bench with the same trepidation and nervousness that she had held the very first time she played for the group, although she had long since stopped fighting the requests and demurring. As soon as her fingers touched the keys, the world would fall away, her face relaxing, and she would give herself over to the song. As her fingers flew over the keys, her body would thrum and move with the soul of the song, first entrancing herself before she captured the others in the room, as if she infused

the notes with the essence of her magic.

That was what had captured his heart. Her ability to play as he brewed, with passion and fire, heart and soul, and magic.

During the rest of the year, he would yearn to hear the melodies that so spoke to his heart. In the weeks following the parties, he would spend his evenings alone in his chambers and sit, eyes closed, and simply remember, his heart aching and eyes wet with unshed tears.

Inside he knew he was not good enough for her. Too broken. Too lost. Too old.

She was young and beautiful, lively and to be cherished.

Not for him.

Over the following weeks, he would slowly recover from his despair, and then, once recovered, he would pass the time chastising himself for his ridiculous and morose behaviour. When he finally found himself strong enough to cast away the depression, he would channel his emotions into the stubbornness and anger that he was so well known for. Any spare moment he found he would fill with potions research or brewing, the only passion he had left. He would continue this way until the next meeting, when the cycle would renew again. Then the music would once again leave his heart breaking, melting and finally moulding itself to hers unknowingly at the touch of the essence of purity within her song.

This Christmas he watched as she moved about the room with her drink in hand. She laughed with their colleagues and wished them each happy Christmas with a sincerity that he could never possess. Knowing what awaited him this night as it had so many times before, he found himself sitting in his chair tucked in the dark corner, waiting. As he had moved across the room toward his secluded corner, he had begun an effort to compartmentalize and control his emotions. It was a sorry job, he knew, but as he walked he silently chanted to himself: *Not good enough. Not good enough.* If only he could hold himself in check, then perhaps just this once he would not need to descend into the darkness afterwards. Now in the shadows with his eyes closed, a grimace moved over his face as he recalled the pain that would await him these next weeks. So many lonely days and nights he had to look forward to. And thus it was that he was startled when he heard someone address him.

"Professor Snape, Happy Chris..." The voice faded off, the tone turning confused. After a moment of silence, it continued again. "Severus, are you well?"

Severus opened his eyes, stunned. Rarely did she speak to him, especially at these gatherings. She always had what his father had always called a 'deer caught in headlights' look about her when they conversed. Tonight, however, as his eyes focused upon her, he found that this was not the case. She seemed calmer than usual and only slightly nervous. Noting the half-empty glass of wine she held in her hand, he wondered if perhaps it had relaxed her.

Taking in a deep breath, he gathered his strength of will and responded in the expected slightly irritated manner. "I am perfectly well, Professor Granger."

"Oh! Good," she said, biting her bottom lip as she rocked from side to side on the balls of her feet. "Well, then, Happy Christmas, Professor." With this she smiled but didn't turn to leave as he expected. Instead she simply stood and watched him.

Severus' brow furrowed as his eyes narrowed in confusion. "And to you, too," he offered, hoping that would satisfy her. For surely if he were forced to talk to her, then all hope of a quick recovery for his heart, especially after a round of her playing, would be dashed.

However, she was not satisfied. She remained before him still, her only movement the slight tapping of her foot and pursing of her lips. Then all of a sudden, as if realizing the awkwardness of their relative positions, hers being standing and his sitting, and the lengthening silence, she glanced at the chair next to his and swiftly sat.

Again Severus was stunned and confused. He couldn't fathom what had possessed her to behave in such away. This was not her normal behaviour, to be sure. Over the six years that they had been colleagues, she had never sat next to him or made any effort to speak to him unless absolutely necessary. He found he could do nothing but wait and let her act out her purpose.

Silence stretched between them as they sat. She was so near he could feel her life, warmth and scent filling the space next to him.

In the isolated corner of the room, the silence slowly became heavy. The pair continued to sit, very aware of each other, unknowingly sharing thoughts. Each of them wondered at the undeniably awkward, but clearly lust-laden, tension mounting in the space between them.

Surely not, he thought.

Puzzled, he watched her set her glass of wine on a nearby table and then fold her hands nervously into her lap. Her eyes had yet to look at him since she'd taken the chair. She appeared to be fixated on a random point across the room, lost in thought. As she had done when she was standing before him, she again drew her bottom lip into her mouth and nibbled as her feet shifted against the floor.

"Professor Granger?" he finally said, no longer able to stand the silent torture. His eyes were full of questions.

Hermione sucked in a quick breath as his voice startled her out of her contemplation. Her eyes flew to his, and then a small smile showed on her face as she gave him a small nod of acknowledgement before once again settling her eyes on the random point across the room.

When her voice finally did sound through the silence, it was very gentle and soft. "I did so enjoy your essay in *Ars Alchemia* last month."

Hermione's eyes turned to gaze at him.

Severus could see that she was questioning his acceptance of the topic. Relief flooded him; he could handle an academic conversation easily enough. Giving Hermione a small nod to indicate his approval of the topic, she smiled and then a bit teasingly added: "Although, I do not think that Master Waffing has enough mental capability to understand that you are not only questioning his sanity but outright mocking him. It was well done. I do not think I have read an essay that has amused me more."

Severus' understanding of the world and the woman sitting beside him shifted in that moment. It was at once disorienting and exciting all at the same time. She had not only read his essay but also understood his little joke. Up to this point no one had understood that he had been mocking the man. Every response he had received up until now had bordered on sycophantic. Thrilled beyond belief, he unexpectedly felt his cheeks flush. In a desperate attempt to pull back on the surging emotions which were causing his heart to beat wildly in his chest, he sent her a small, wry smirk and replied in an equally quiet voice: "I do believe that you and I are the only ones. I have been sorely disappointed that my fellow Potions masters apparently do not possess such quick minds. Do you often read potions journals?"

"I do. Potions has always been a subject I enjoy, the elemental nature of it specifically, how one is combining the essence of their own magic with that of nature in order to create unbelievable concoctions. It appeals to me." She took a breath, and as she continued enthusiastically he noticed a sparkle in her eyes. "What wondrous things can be made without a wand in hand. I have always loved the diversity and intimacy of brewing. Potions can be both delicate and potent, filled with simplicities while remaining unbelievably complex."

She fell silent for a moment before adding in a sardonic tone: "Somewhat ironic, isn't it? Coming from me, the wand-waving Charms mistress. I find that as much as I love Charms, which...I might add...I am very good at, it does amount to a bunch of foolish wand waving, in the end. For my own personal enjoyment, I find Potions has more substance than any other subject." Hermione laughed lightly.

Severus took a sip of his nearby Firewhisky. His movements were sharp and deliberate as he tried, for all he was worth, to appear calm and natural. "Indeed. Potions has always been my passion. Over the years I have found that it is the only subject with enough complexity to keep my attention consistently. The physical act of brewing, preparing ingredients, testing and studying the results of new potions, they all enthral me. That in a few hours one can take simple ingredients and create powerful life-changing potions... It is intoxicating."

Hermione's eyes looked thoughtful as she smiled and spoke again in quiet and sincere tones, "I remember your passion. I always enjoyed the absolute passion that you would display when you brewed for us in class. That was how I always knew that there was something more to you than the scary persona. I could see it when you brewed."

Here he chuckled, unexpectedly for both of them, causing Hermione to fall silent in surprise. She had spoken the words with such confident kindness. There was such genuine sincerity about Hermione, it was tinged with playfulness, and he couldn't help but be pleased. And in the pleasure he could feel his heart once again reshaping itself, and this time it was not to her music but instead to her words, to her smiles and to her sweetness.

With a raised eyebrow and a smirk firmly fixed upon his face, he replied. "More to me? So you found me out, I see. Again I believe you may be the only one. Others see what they want, not what is there."

Hermione nodded, suddenly serious. "It has always been that way, Severus, for me as well. I will always be Hermione Granger: bookworm, know-it-all and friend to Harry Potter. As if that is all I am." This last bit she punctuated with a scoff.

Severus understood. For intellectually serious individuals they were often viewed as an object or a sum of their achievements but nothing more. To most people, they had little-to-no value beyond that of their knowledge and works. They were very similar, indeed. Suddenly, feeling confident that in her he could find a kindred soul, he ventured to say: "Hermione, what you see in me when I brew, I see in you when you play. It is your passion."

"Oh," she gasped as her cheeks coloured a beautifully. "You've got me there. I do love to play, although I am nearly sick each time Minerva asks me."

"Yes, I know," he replied with small nod.

As if she had read Hermione's thoughts, the pair suddenly heard Minerva asking if anyone had seen Hermione.

Hermione sighed and picked up her glass of wine. "Well, that is me. I suppose I should go to her," she said as she stood.

"Will you play for her tonight?" he asked.

For a moment Hermione watched Severus, seriously considering his question. Her eyes locked on his as she spoke in a hushed conspiratorial tone. "No, I don't think that I shall play for her tonight, Severus."

Severus' stomach dropped. As much as the music tore him apart, to be deprived of it unexpectedly was a blow, especially after actually speaking to her and finding her to be so much more than he had ever imagined. He didn't realize how much the music had meant to him, how much she had meant to him, until that moment. His face fell; such was his shock that he made no effort to mask his sadness at her decision.

"Severus," Hermione whispered as her free hand reached down to cover his. Her smile was soft, and her eyes were filled with great gentleness. "For her, no. I have played for her for too long. Tonight I will play for you." As her smile grew to a grin and her eyes grew wet with unshed tears, signs that she, too, felt the depth of emotion passing between them, she continued. "You see me. I think it is time to show you one more thing." Then, with a shakily inhaled breath, she drummed up her last bit of bravery and placed a small kiss upon his cheek. As she pulled back, their eyes met. The smile on her face was playful as she gave his hand a quick squeeze, and then she walked away to find Minerva and the awaiting piano.

This Christmas as Severus sat in his chair listening to Hermione play, he was not sad or filled with dread of the long, lonely days ahead. As Severus heard the notes on the piano being a clear, simple tune, he was surprised that it was accompanied by a beautiful clear voice.

Hermione's voice.

I loved you once in silence and mis'ry was all I knew...

And as she sang he found that, instead of drowning the despair of a broken and lonely heart this Christmas, perhaps just this once he could find hope of something a little more.

Trying so to keep my love from showing,

All the while not knowing you loved me too.

Yes, loved me in lonesome silence;

Your heart filled with dark despair.

Thinking love would flame in you forever,

And I'd never, never know the flame was there.

Then one day we cast away our secret longing;

The raging tide we held inside would hold no more.

The silence at last was broken!

We flung wide our prison door.

Ev'ry joyous word of love was spoken.

As Hermione played out the rest of the song in silence, she let her eyes search the dark corner of the room for the man hidden in his chair. She could just make out the smile that played on his lips. And when the song was complete, she turned her head fully toward him. With eyes glitteringly with mischief, she watched as he stood and began to walk across the room. Not wanting to draw to more attention to her, Hermione began to quietly play a Christmas carol. Before long she felt cool lips brush her ear softly and a quiet, husky voice whisper: "For me?"

Not looking up from her task, she kept her mind focused on the notes of her song as she nodded, a smile firmly placed on her face.

"You mean it? Sincerely?" he quested, almost frantic in his need to know.

Again, she nodded.

She heard him let out a nearly undetectable sigh, and then his husky voice played in her ear as his breath tickled against her sensitive neck. "Well, then... My love, would you allow me to see you home?"

The music abruptly stopped as all the heads turned toward the unlikely pair at the piano.

Hermione turned to Severus and shyly nodded her consent. Taking that hand he extended toward her, he guided her from the room.

As they walked down the quiet, deserted school halls, hand in hand, she said: "You realize that they are all talking about us now. Right?"

"Indeed," he said with a smirk.

"And that is okay with you?" She turned to face him, halting their progress.

"Hermione, am I correct in my understanding that you wish to...," he paused as he struggled to find the correct words, "...that you wish to be mine?" His face was serious as his eyes alternated from her eyes to her lips.

"That was the general idea," she confessed nervously.

"And you love me?" His voice was still serious.

With wide eyes and a fluttering heart, she answered him sincerely. "I do. I have for years. And you love me?"

"For years," he said in confirmation.

"Forever?" she pushed as their eyes seared into each other.

"That could be arranged," he said huskily as he drew her into what would be the first of many kisses.

As he walked back to his quarters alone that evening, Severus knew that there was no way he could ever let Hermione go. If she would consent, then he would see them married before the New Year, and never again would he have to be parted from the music and woman that touched him so.

A/N: Thank you to Lyre Flowers for the lightening quick beta! You rock!"