

# Broken By A Kiss

*by Meladara*

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## Chapter One

*Chapter 1 of 1*

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Happy New Year!

~Love, Meladara~

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Hermione let out a shaky breath as she hastily removed the stasis spell on the potion. She could hear him stepping toward her, the sound of his feet moving with determined purpose from his office where they had just been. Glancing toward him, she quickly forced her attention back to the potion and stirred, her eyes glued to her task before her.

"Hermione," he whispered.

"Don't, Severus," she pleaded quietly, her stomach bubbling in confusion and disgust.

"Please, look at me?"

A tear slipped down her cheek, and Hermione quickly dashed it away with her free hand. Her stomach churned again; this whole situation was sickening. She was sick with herself, sick with him, sick with everyone. She was better than this; they were all better than this.

Making the final stir, she slowly withdrew the rod and waited for the potion to exhibit the tell-tale shimmer that would indicate its efficacy. As she saw the glimmer begin at the outer edge of the still-swirling liquid and then continue to spread through the potion, Hermione took a step back from the cauldron and doused the flames before looking up at the man who was watching her intently.

Letting out a sigh, she asked with exasperation, "Please, can we not do this now, Severus? I've got—"

"Don't ply me with inane excuses, Hermione," he snapped.

Hermione's head fell, and her body shook with emotion. Gulping, she forced herself to speak. Her voice rang firm and harsh in the silent room. "Do you know what this would make me? What this would make us? The level it will drag us to? I cannot... I will not."

Severus sighed as he watched her shaking hands. She was hurting and it was his fault, but still, he couldn't have stopped himself from reaching out to her. What had happened had been a long time coming. It hurt to see her so angry and distraught now; he had not intended for her to feel so betrayed. However, he could understand her

reaction, even if it hurt him profoundly.

"You are not happy with him," he said simply. Those were the words that they both knew were true but neither had ever dared voice.

"You think I don't know that?" she questioned, the ire in her voice rising suddenly. "You think that fact isn't my first and last thought of the day? It is sung in every breath and step and action of my life, but I cannot..." Hermione gestured toward his office door and scene of their transgression. "I am better than that. I owe him more respect than that. And you... You deserve better! You deserve more!"

"And what about *you*, Hermione?" He asked, his voice empty of emotions. The words washed over her in a wave of cold callousness that belied to her how deeply he felt them. "What about your own happiness? Will you never do something for yourself?"

Looking down at her feet, the tears once again starting to trickle down her cheeks as she wrung her hands and mentally grasped for solid ground on which to support her life again.

What about her, indeed?

How had the walls she'd constructed fallen so completely?

They had been working together for years without them failing her. Years of sharing parts of herself with him, years of small, but allowable, betrayals, and the walls had stood tall and strong. Today, in a single touch, one brushing of his hand across her cheek and pressing of their lips in silent, passionate declaration of love, and he had broken her utterly. She could not hide from the truth any longer, no matter how much she wished the walls would appear once again.

"You know that I can't, Severus," she whispered, shaking her head. "You have everything else; leave me this."

Severus' eyes filled with absolute despairing hurt, a hurt so immense that she thought her heart would burst on the spot. When he finally spoke, he did not spit out the words. How she wished that he would react with anger and strength, but he did not. Instead, he spoke softly, as if whispering a solemn truth into the dark of night, utterly vulnerable to her in a way he had never been before. "That, Hermione, is where you are wrong. I have nothing."

Closing her eyes, she took in several calming breaths, hoping to mentally reconstruct her walls. However, it was useless. She could find nothing but those once-hidden truths. He held her heart and soul, but he was not her husband, and that was the reality of the situation. It would destroy them both, and she knew she could not take the final step across the divide separating them. It would be a betrayal to them all. Finally, she looked into his eyes with sadness. "I am so sorry, Severus."

For the second time that afternoon, Severus reached out to her and brushed away both the curls and tears that rested upon her cheeks.

Hermione flinched away from the sudden contact and stumbled back, as if stung. Nausea flooded her as she looked at him with wild, betrayed eyes. "Don't. Touch. Me." She bit out the words bitterly, startling Severus with her vehemence, and he froze.

"Please," she pleaded frantically, her voice once again falling in into hushed tones. "Why can't you see what it does to me? Everything it steals from me, from you. I beg you, give me time to sort out my feelings. You must give me the time I need."

"That is complete shite, Hermione. And you know it. After everything..." He trailed off as the unfairness of the entire situation struck him in a single blow. Why did he always have to be the one to sacrifice what he wanted? Why was he always the one left wanting? "After an age of companionship with me, can you not make a choice in my favour?" he demanded. "Do you not owe me, too?"

"I owe you?!" she cried in disbelief. "What do I owe you, Severus? What? My heart? My mind? My secrets?" Sobs began to shake her frame as she continued. "You have all those, you bastard. Not him. Not my children. No one but you. You own my heart, mind, and soul, Severus. Forgive me if I refuse to cross the final line into damnation."

Severus swallowed the lump in his throat and nodded stiffly. He would not press her further; she was right, and he did not want to poison the only precious thing he had in his life. Approaching her again, he raised his hands, palm up in surrender and said, "Do not worry, I will not do it again. But please, let me help you, love. Just this once, let me offer you what comfort I can." He watched her silently as she processed his words, and then, when she gave him a small nod, he quickly drew her into a tight embrace. Hermione could not help but surrender herself with relief into the tender care of his loving arms.

As Hermione clung to him and wept, regrets flooded her heart. So many things she wished undone. If only she could have known then what she knew now. Hermione knew very well that such wishing never worked in one's favor. Nor did she really wish to change everything; she loved her children dearly. But her heart and life were shattered, broken to pieces by this wonderful man's act of desperate love. However, in the end, she knew that her broken state was not his fault. No, Hermione knew she had only herself to blame.

As she stood in the arms of her love, it suddenly didn't matter any longer that she felt trapped in this unhappy life; she wouldn't hide from the truth any longer. She would face the reality of her actions and the truths she had been denying for so long, and then, if she could, she would find a way to break herself free. Her only hope was that, when the dust settled, Severus and she would be able to find common ground, and if they were lucky, perhaps a small piece of happiness together.

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*A/N: Massive thanks to Laralee, who did a lightning quick beta for me! Thanks a million, dear. And to my dear readers, thank you for reading and thank you double for each review! They make my days bright! ~Meladara~*