

Maybe Next Year

by Savva

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Chapter 1

Chapter 1 of 1

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Huge thank you to my alpha Quilter and beta Dany. You guys rock; I hope you know that!

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Maybe Next Year...

1.

'*Hope dies last*', they said. Well, apparently, whoever said that was right. The wretched thing had sneakily settled in his heart, seemingly for good. Surprisingly, he had been unconsciously sheltering it there, all these years. Every once in a while, it had been reduced to a mere spark, and yet it had survived the heartbreak and betrayal, the hell of the war, and the dreadful aftermath. Just as he had.

At times, his hopes had been pitiful. He even had hoped for his own death, at one point. Predictably, though, he had never seen any of those hopes come true. Still, against all odds, hope kept pulsing somewhere deep inside his tattered soul, stubbornly refusing to let go and finally leave him alone. Time and time again, he found something to hope for. This time around, Severus Snape once again hoped for love. One would have thought that he should have known better at forty-three. Alas, he had had no say in this at all. The damned thing had just happened, easily overruling his intention to stop and disregarding all his arguments against it. For four years, this stupid, nonsensical feeling had been disobediently smouldering in his chest, decidedly making a wimp and a ninny out of him.

Every now and then, with a glass of firewhisky in his hand, he mused about what exactly it would take for this nuisance finally to go away and die. Would it be a ring on the witch's finger? Would a bunch of ginger-haired little suckers around her do the trick? Or would they still not be enough? Would his bloody pathetic heart find something to hope for even then? Would there ever be an end to this utter madness? He truly wasn't sure.

It had started harmlessly enough. Maybe even too harmlessly to end well - that should probably have given him a clue. Four years ago, she had come to him and proposed

an alliance: a business venture, to be precise. She had somehow acquired money, and he had a skill; together, they had worked out an idea and opened an apothecary.

The first year had been rough and bumpy, filled with the fierce clashes of their rather volatile personalities and, of course, an excessively annoying degree of public scrutiny. By the end of it, however, the dust had settled, their business had begun to grow, and they had learned first to tolerate and then even appreciate each other. Notably, one of them had managed to overdo the appreciation part, though, with his usual cynicism, he had told himself that it could have been any witch. That it had been *her* only due to the proximity they had worked in, and to his hunger for intimacy. Still, he wasn't cynical enough to deny that she *was* a remarkable witch, the best of her kind, actually, and he simply, primitively wanted her for himself.

Couldn't *he*, and not that oaf, have something precious for once in his life? Hadn't he earned at least the right to hope for it? He pondered for the hundredth time, sitting near his fireplace on Christmas Day. "Probably not," he concluded, and tossed the bottle of firewhisky back into the cabinet. It wouldn't help: he knew that. It was the fourth Christmas he had spent in the futile hope that maybe this year Hermione Granger would finally see the light and dump a certain ginger-haired dunderhead. His rational side, however, knew precisely that that would never happen. Moreover, he was absolutely sure that, even if she ended it with Weasley, she would never look on him as a replacement. He wasn't a proper match for her, by any means. Grumpy, much older, forever burdened with his dark past, he didn't consider himself a match for any woman, let alone *this* woman.

So, in the meantime, having needed to deal with his obsession for four years or so already, he indulged himself with buying Christmas presents for her. Although he had specifically forbidden any exchange of gifts at work, it hadn't stopped him from getting them for her in secret. It had given him a sense of involvement, even if it was a false one. During this wretched holiday season, he needed and eagerly embraced that particular lie, knowing quite well that he would punish the witch for his weakness with extra snappiness when all that jingle-bell-ringing hell had ebbed into oblivion.

This year's present stood in front of him, intricately wrapped and disgustingly cheerful. The sour feeling that it would end up in his cupboard, just as the three previous ones had done, was firmly lodged in his throat. And yet hope, that bloody whore, was already murmuring into his ear in her deceiving, saccharine voice: "Maybe next year ..."

He had bought a negligee set, this time. He already had a vintage charm book, a cashmere shawl, and a set of ivory hair-accessories in his collection of Christmas presents for Hermione Granger, so this year, he had decided to try something adventurous. *At least I shall have an opportunity to imagine her wearing this lingerie during my occasional rendezvous with my hand in the loo*, he noted snidely to himself, fixing his black eyes on the box once again. *While Ronald Weasley enjoys the real thing*, flashed in his head, as his subconscious readily supplied him with the bright image of a half-naked ginger-head slobbering all over Hermione.

"Ah, to hell with it!" he spluttered and hurled the present into the fireplace.

Alas, or perhaps, luckily, before the festively-decorated box reached the fire, the Floo burst into green flames, and a disturbingly-dishevelled Arthur with Molly in tow stepped into Severus's living room. The present hit Arthur square in the chest, successfully tipping him and subsequently Molly over, just like dominoes. Severus had time to smirk before the redheads asked in unison, "Is Hermione with you, Severus? She's had a row with Ronald, and we can't find her anywhere."

Suddenly, the voice of hope in his ear became even sweeter. *Maybe next year*, it whispered optimistically, and, for once, he believed it.

Maybe.

2.

He didn't bother her with his presence for the rest of the holiday season. Familiar with heartbreak, he reckoned that she needed a chance to regroup, and perhaps she preferred to do it in private. If not, he reasoned with himself, she always had an army of friends at her disposal. Besides, he knew quite well that if, by some odd chance, she wanted him to comfort her, she would dig him up even from the grave, as the force that could stop her when she was determined was yet to be discovered.

That momentary break also provided him with an opportunity to work out his plan of conquering Miss Hermione Granger. Because, apparently, his damnable infatuation, combined with that bloody hope, which now was all but roaring in his ears, made it impossible for him to stay away from her. He wanted the girl, damn it!

He began his deliberate advance on the ninth of January, rightly assuming that she wouldn't be able to turn down a dinner invitation from him on his birthday. She didn't, and they went on from there. Cautiously, step by baby step, he shifted his strictly professional demeanour toward something more genuine, though it took almost a dozen dinners and lunches before he felt comfortable enough to let his affection for her shine through his usually inscrutable facade. Eventually, he slowly began to open up, showing her glimpses and pieces of his true self.

Hermione, on the other hand, didn't really burden herself with such nonsense and just dumped her affection on him. One bright spring morning, she burst through the back door of their apothecary, immediately filling the room with her beaming enthusiasm, focused her cinnamon eyes on him, and said that she had woken up with an epiphany. Apparently, she liked him awfully and had done for quite some time, as well. According to her, he had the most seductive voice, the most fascinating hands, and the most mouth-watering bum humankind had ever known. The *bum* bit dumbfounded him and almost made him blush. Nevertheless, he was more flattered than he cared to admit, though he would beg to differ about the last part, because one pert, heart-shaped bottom most definitely already occupied that particular pedestal, in his humble opinion, anyway. She ended her confession by pressing her soft, warm lips to the corner of his mouth, successfully knocking the breath out of his lungs. A random customer managed to ruin the moment, of course, but the process of seduction significantly sped up right after that encounter.

They returned to their 'discussion' that same evening, after he had closed and appropriately warded their apothecary against customers, villains, super-heroes, and every other blasted creature in between, ensuring that there would be no interruptions. He cornered her between muslin bags containing different species of Saintpaulia, and kissed her until her eyes became glassy and unfocused, her breath turned into shallow puffs, and he could feel a slight taste of copper on his tongue.

Yes! That's how it's done, Ronald bloody Weasley! he thought, observing her delectable state of dishevelment.

He continued to torment her and himself for three long weeks, intentionally drawing out the phase of kisses and light, innocent touches. Frankly, he rather enjoyed the startled look on Potter's face when the living legend of Wizarding World caught them during an intense snogging session. Disconcertingly, though, Luna Lovegood didn't look surprised or disgusted. A very strange girl, indeed! The occasional photos in the *Daily Prophet*, unexpectedly, didn't annoy him in the slightest. He even found them amusing, imagining the faces of the Weasleys every time. After all, Severus Snape wasn't supposed to be nice.

Soon, however, it became apparent that, even though he immensely relished Hermione's kisses, the warmth of her hands around his neck, and the sweetness of the words that she whispered into his ear, as a grown man, he needed more, much, much more. Thus, about four weeks after their first kiss, they moved their romance farther, and his tongue finally got a chance to taste everything else she had to offer. Sure enough, she didn't disappoint, far from it. Oh, how he savoured the process of meticulously learning his lioness' every dusty-pink peak and silky cavity. At times, her unblemished skin and the smooth perfection of her curves made him want to cry. He didn't allow himself any such luxury, however. Instead, he spent a considerable amount of time, during the hot summer months, demonstrating to her that size, experience, and skill *did* matter in the fine art of intimacy. He was genuinely hoping that, by the time he had shown her everything he was capable of, she would never want or need to look at any other wizard.

Selfish as ever, he set about corrupting his precious girl in every delicious, sinful way possible, teaching her that nothing was off limits as long as it was pleasurable for both of them. Slowly but surely, he made her crave his dexterous fingers, hot mouth, and other actively-involved appendages, such as his enormous nose. By the winter, no place had been left undiscovered and no orifice untouched, and if the way her eyes resembled molten chocolate every time he touched her was any indication, she was addicted to him as much as he was to her. Alas, although he valued the flame of desire that was undeniably smouldering between them, it still wasn't quite enough for him. He still yearned to have more.

It was Hermione's heart he was after.

3.

Before long, yet another Christmas came to the Potions master, though this one was incomparably better than all the others that he cared to remember. Just one tiny little detail - that Hermione Granger was still peacefully slumbering beside him, in his bed, in his pathetically small house at Spinner's End - singlehandedly put this Christmas beyond any comparison.

Despite all that, however, he found himself rather tense this morning. Today was the day! Today, he was going to bare his heart to the witch, and the mere thought of what he was about to do made him fidget. No, he never fidgeted - he was just slightly concerned.

"Slightly concerned, my arse!" he grumbled into the fragrant curls of the woman in his arms and resolutely closed his eyes, willing himself to relax. Alas, the relaxing part didn't quite work. No matter how hard he tried, he couldn't stop thinking about the fact that yesterday he had gathered the whole collection of Christmas presents for Hermione which he had managed to acquire during the last five years, put them all in a large box, wrapped it especially elaborately, and dropped it under Hermione's Christmas tree. That was that! There was no turning back now, and it was bloody terrifying. Unless, of course, he got up right this moment, sneaked into her flat while she was still sleeping, and snatched the blasted thing from under the tree. Well, he might do just that. There would always be next year, after all.

Hermione stirred slightly, just as that traitorous idea crossed Severus's mind. "Damn," he muttered under his breath and braced himself for the day of revelations. A hot, wandering palm under the covers, however, and the words "Good morning, Severus," whispered against his neck in a voice, which was husky from sleep, managed to distract him with unnerving ease.

His heavy thoughts returned much later, after they had finished a prolonged and rather satisfying morning 'entertainment' in bed. Hermione leaped from the bed, saying, "I'll be right back," and, to his slight disappointment, wrapped her burgundy dressing-gown around her naked form. A minute later, she disappeared behind the door. "I'll bring all the presents here, Severus," he heard her calling from the living-room, before the roar of the Floo signalled that she was gone.

"Oh, fuck," he growled. There was only one thing left to do now: wait. And so he lay there, in his suddenly cold and lonely bed, and patiently waited, feeling how, with every passing minute, his heart bled into his chest cavity more and more profusely, metaphorically speaking, of course. And, as if that weren't enough, the warming spark of hope that had kept him going all these years had suddenly faded. Where was the bloody thing when he needed it?

4.

Almost two hours had passed, and the witch hadn't come back. Severus had already gone through multiple stages of despair and was now contemplating where the right place would be to look for a rock he could crawl under and hide forever when the Floo roared once again. The sound of her hurried steps reverberated throughout the house, and the next moment, she burst into his bedroom. It was a Gryffindor thing: they all burst, they were all physically incapable of simply walking into a room.

Hermione burst into his bedroom. Her face was tear-stained but happy, his negligee set from last Christmas was peeking from under her dressing gown, and his ivory set from two Christmases before had been hastily arranged in her tousled hair. She was a right mess with her eyes and nose red, her gown apparently inside-out, and a single, stray blue ribbon attached to her right slipper, but despite all that, she was the most exquisite and precious mess he had ever seen. And, by the look of it, she was *his* mess, *his and his only*.

"Severus, I," she started, but a soft sob interfered, and she had to bite her trembling lower lip.

"Shh," he shushed her, though it took all his self-control not to give into the urge to sob as well. That would have been a shame! "Come here," he managed to say, after a brief pause. She flew into his arms and buried her face in his chest. He tightened his arms around her, savouring the feel of her warm body against his. He had missed her so bloody much.

"I have one more present for you, Hermione," he whispered and conjured a little black box.

Hermione lifted her face and breathed out a shocked "Severus!" once again.

"They were my grandmother's," he explained, clicking the box open and revealing a pair of vintage peach opal earrings.

"Oh," she sighed, and a second later, a very, very sentimental witch was straddling him and showering his face with tears and kisses.

"You, Severus Snape, have some explaining to do," she declared when she caught her breath, poking his bare chest with her little finger.

"Don't be tiresome," he replied, smoothing the dressing-gown from her shoulders and admiring the way the peach silk looked against her skin. He cupped her breasts and grunted, savouring their familiar heaviness in his palms.

Hermione arched into his hands, murmuring, "Be nice, you naughty, naughty wizard. I have a present for you, too. It's under the tree, in the living-room."

"You talk too much, you know," he said and kissed her nipple through the material. Nipping along the plunging neckline of her slip, he determined that, as much as he liked that peach silk lingerie on her, it had to go as well. He vanished it with a quick spell, shifted her so that she was trapped under him, and claimed her lips with his. Then there was a long, long while when nothing remotely coherent was emitted.

"So," he asked, when both of them could string words into sentences again, "when are you going to move in with me? Your constant hopping between two houses annoys me no end."

"I dunno," she drawled tiredly. "Maybe next year..."

The end