

# Hyperbole

*by stgulik*

Hermione is about to publish her first book. Unfortunately, her new publisher seems to be of two minds about the matter. Literally.

## Chapter 1

*Chapter 1 of 3*

Hermione is about to publish her first book. Unfortunately, her new publisher seems to be of two minds about the matter. Literally.

*Written for the SSHG Promptfest 2013. This story is complete in three chapters, so dive right in and begin, o ye faithful. The original prompt is given at the very end. I'd like to thank teddyradiator and nagandsev, who stepped up and became my lovely alpha and beta team. Ladies, you're the best.*

Hermione Granger sat at her plain student desk, a cooling cup of tea near at hand, and read three letters that had turned her world upside-down in as many days.

The letter that had arrived first had been expected...indeed, highly anticipated.

*Das Zauberberg Institut*

*Zurich,*

*Switzerland*

*November 20, 2000*

*Dear Miss Granger,*

*Thank you for the submission of your manuscript. Your name is, of course, by no means unfamiliar to us here at Sebastian & Sebalus Publishing! It is an honor to have someone of your stature choose our publishing house for her first book.*

*The next step in the process is a final review by the publisher. Please be assured, I will personally oversee your manuscript through the review process. If you have any questions at all, feel free to send an owl to my attention.*

*All the best!*

*Amelia Arbuckle, Associate Editor*

*Sebastian & Sebalus Publishing*

*52 Hyperb Alley*

London

Hermione smiled. She had looked forward to receiving an acknowledgement for submission of her first manuscript, but the friendly and encouraging tone was more than she had dared to hope for.

During the war, necessity had been the mother of invention, and Hermione's inventiveness had truly been put to the test. Being a bookworm and the brightest witch of her age, she had time and time again concocted new spells to suit their needs during her months-long trek across Great Britain with Harry and Ron in search of horcruxes. She pioneered a method of applying Charms that she had never read about before, a way to lay incantations atop one another, yielding results which were greater than the sum of their parts.

After the war ended and life settled down for better or worse, she decided to pursue an advanced education in Charms at the Zauberberg Institut in Switzerland. It was here she was able to understand the work she had accomplished in her teenage years through a brand-new, theoretical knowledge of Charms.

And being Hermione Granger, she had soon written a book that melded her graduate studies with her war experience.

Her professors were gratifyingly enthusiastic, encouraging her to seek publication and add her knowledge to the body of work in Charms theory. They had recommended European publishers, but Hermione had seen an advertisement for a new publishing house in Britain, and on impulse, decided to submit her manuscript for consideration.

It had been over a month since she had written to Sebastian & Sebalus. The decision to publish someone took time, naturally, and Hermione had tried to stay patient by throwing herself into her studies. But finally, patience had been rewarded with good news.

Ruefully, she wondered if the enthusiastic tone of the response had less to do with the subject of Charms theory, and more to do with her fame back home. Studying abroad for the last three years, she had almost managed to forget the way people back home reacted to Hermione Granger, friend to Harry Potter and war heroine.

The next day, the owl appeared at her dormitory window. It seemed that her book's subject matter...or her residual celebrity...truly had earned her a fast track.

*Dear Miss Granger,*

*Thank you for your submission. Upon review, we have decided to accept your book Multilayer Charms in Theory and Practice for publication.*

*Enclosed is a standard, self-replicating contract. Please review it thoroughly, and if you agree to the terms, sign and return the original by owl.*

*On behalf of Sebastian Publishing, I would like to welcome you. We look forward to a long and successful relationship.*

*Sincerely,*

*S.T. Sebastian*

*Publisher*

*Sebastian & Sebalus Publishing*

*52 Hyperb Alley*

*London*

Hermione had spent an hour or so reading the fine print before she showed the contract to her academic advisor. "It's a generous arrangement, Fräulein Granger," she said admiringly. "They must want to publish you very badly."

Under the terms of the contract, if Sebastian & Sebalus broke the contract, it would be obliged to pay her a hefty sum in compensation. However, she was allowed to break the contract with impunity any time between now and the actual date of production.

Satisfied, Hermione signed on the dotted line and asked her professor to witness. Together they watched as the parchment pinched itself in the middle and split into two. *Nice charms work*, she thought, before rolling and tying the contract and sending the publisher's owl on its way.

She spent the next day basking in her good fortune ... until the owl arrived a third time, bearing what looked for all the world like a form letter. Not only that, it appeared to be from the very same person who had awarded her a contract the day before.

*Dear Hermione J. Granger:*

*The manuscript which you submitted has been carefully considered. It is with deepest regret that we must inform you it has been found unavailable for publication.*

*We wish you all the best in your future endeavors.*

*S.T. Sebastian*

*Publisher*

*Sebastian & Sebalus Publishing*

*52 Hyperb Alley*

*London*

Absentmindedly, she reached for her stone-cold tea while she compared the three letters again, wondering what on earth was going on at Wizarding Britain's newest publishing house.

-oOo-

"Mrs. Arbuckle!"

With a sigh, Amelia heaved herself out of her chair and stuck her head in the door of the publisher's office. Severus Snape sat behind a large oak desk piled high with paper...bills, mostly, Amelia knew.

"Yes, Mr. Snape?" she asked.

He picked up one roll of parchment and threw it to her. Unrolling it, she saw it was a contract...the very first contract issued by their firm, surely...signed and dated by Hermione Granger.

"Oh, how nice," she remarked, surprised. "But I thought you told me you...or rather, 'Mr. Sebastian'...had decided to pass on her manuscript."

"I did pass on it," he growled. "It was an autobiography of dubious distinction, pretending to be a serious academic tome, not suitable for publication."

"Then why..."

"Look at the initials at the top of the contract."

She looked. "Oh, dear."

Severus took back the parchment and re-rolled it tightly. "Please ask 'Mr. Sebalus' to join me at his earliest convenience."

-oOo-

By the time Lucius Malfoy made his way from the Manor, through the Floo in the dusty mail room and down the hall to the office, Hermione Granger's contract had begun to look quite badly rumped in Severus's hand.

"Is this your idea of being a silent partner?" demanded Severus when Lucius walked in.

"Now, Severus..."

"When I took you on, it was with the understanding that *only* I would be selecting the manuscripts for publishing."

"That's absurd," said Lucius. "I would never have agreed to such a thing. What would that leave me to do, exactly? Write checks? Where is the joy in that?"

"Joy? Forgive me, aren't you getting enough joy these days? I would think, being on probation, you would be joyful enough being able to live your life outside of prison."

"Don't be tedious," replied Lucius. "Besides, you didn't take me on; I took *you* on. I need to keep busy or I'll run mad. Politics is out, the Board of Governors is out, so I invest in companies such as yours. I like to see them succeed; it makes us all so frightfully rich," he added with a smirk. "But if you ever inferred that I would stay out of the day-to-day operation, you were woefully mistaken. May I?" He took a seat across from the desk, crossing his legs and brushing an imaginary speck off the knee of his immaculate woolen trousers before continuing.

"Severus, I'll get right to the point so as not to take up your valuable time. I have looked at your balance sheet and noticed you are no closer to solvency than you were six months ago."

Severus scowled. "It takes time to start a publishing company. You need the right manuscripts."

"Indeed. That is exactly why I took matters into my own hands and offered Granger a contract for her book."

Severus shook his head. "Did you even bother to open it and read it?"

"I didn't have to. It's a book by Hermione Granger, British war heroine. People will flock to buy it. That's all I needed to know."

"It's an irresponsible piece of student work. I believe she has all sorts of wild theories about Charms and the things one can accomplish with them."

"You *believe*?" drawled Lucius. "Have *you* bothered to read it?"

Severus felt the conversation was getting away from him. "Well, not yet..."

"Charms theory sounds innovative to me. And even if it's not, it will still make this publishing house start to earn revenue at last."

"She'll set a tone of mediocrity," Severus protested. "People won't take our future publications seriously."

Lucius flicked a lazy hand. "Tosh. You worry too much."

"I don't suppose you are willing to work with her and bring her book up to standard."

"Heavens, no. Surely I've done my part. You know I have no head for academics."

Severus raised a hand wearily. "Stop. No more of this farce. You've left me no choice."

"I knew you'd see it my way." Lucius smirked as he rose to go.

But later that night, after indulging in a few too many glasses of port rather than read his new firm's first manuscript, Severus Snape saw a way out.

The cheapest way to get out of his contractual obligation without having to pay a hefty penalty to his client was to induce her to break the contract herself.

He pulled out a parchment and blearily began hunting for a fresh quill.

-oOo-

*Dear Miss Granger,*

*The staff at Sebastian & Sebalus Publishing offers our most sincere apologies for the unfortunate clerical error of the other day. As our newest client, we welcome you aboard.*

*As you may already know, the Children's Literature genre is a growing field, and that is why S&S is excited to begin the process of publishing the memoir of your adolescent years.*

*It pleases me to inform you we have already been in contact with that well-known children's periodical Granny Boo's Young Reader Quarterly. They are quite interested in publishing a few excerpts in an upcoming issue. We all believe reprinting a chapter or two from your imaginative little book will thrill young readers.*

*Congratulations again on this prestigious achievement.*

*Sincerely,*

*S.T. Sebastian*

*Publisher*

*Sebastian Publishing*

52 Hyperb Alley

London

-o0o-

Dear Mr. Sebastian,

Thank you for straightening out the matter of the clerical error. Your latest letter, while relieving my mind on one count, has alarmed me to no end on another.

Are you quite certain you are referring to my book? I must remind you that my book is not a memoir; it is a book on Charms theory. Specifically, it fully describes the improvement, privacy and protection charms I learned to modify when I was a student at Hogwarts.

The principal thrust of the book is academic, though I do necessarily discuss the history and circumstances of my travels and adventures during the war. They led me to look for and find innovative solutions to desperate problems, and are integral to understanding the state of mind most conducive to casting charms. It is my hope the book will provide new material in the field of Charms theory.

I hope this clarifies the matter. Thank you for your especial attention.

Sincerely,

H.G.

-o0o-

Dear Miss Granger,

Thank you for your reply. There has been no mistake. In point of fact, it is our professional opinion that your book should be edited with an eye toward presenting it as more of a memoir suitable for our younger readership, preferably ages 8 to 11.

It is commendable that you wish to add your young voice to the astonishingly prolific collection of war memoirs available today. Please be assured, your children's book will be published by professionals who know how best to market your work with an eye for what the public would like to read from you.

Severus tried to stop the smirk from spreading on his face, before remembering he was alone. He smirked with impunity as he considered his last lines. He felt sure she would immediately tear up her contract when she read them. But just in case his patronizing demeanor did not do the trick, he inked his quill and prepared to deliver the final blow.

You will be pleased to learn that several chapters of your manuscript may be turned into a wireless play, starring none other than Nell Honeygold. The working title, as I understand, is "Hermione Granger and the Camping Trip of Doom." S&S will be more than happy to help in any way we can to advise you concerning the terms of this separate contract, as you are a student and may feel hampered by a lack of expertise in the matter of subcontracts.

Anxiously awaiting your reply,

S.T.S.

-o0o-

It took a day for Hermione's hands to stop shaking long enough to set quill to parchment. There was nothing to be said but that the man was being deliberately obtuse for some reason, and she stopped holding back with him.

Mr. Sebastian,

With all due respect, sir, does your lack of consideration reflect the integrity of your own business or the deplorable state of publishing in general? Or are you coming down with some regrettable malady that has addled your brain?

For the last time, my book is not a memoir. It is an academic treatise on the properties of particular charms when cast in multiples. I hope for it to eventually take its place among the annals of Charms theory, not bedtime stories.

I'll thank you to quit telling me how happy I should be that my work will be featured in popular magazines and silly, sensationalist wireless programs!

In the future, I hereby request that your Associate Editor, Amelia Arbuckle, be prevailed upon to work with me.

Wishing you a speedy recovery,

H.G.

-o0o-

Dear Miss Granger,

Sebastian & Sebalus Publishing is as yet a small enterprise, and we pride ourselves on offering excellent service when escorting our authors through the publication process.

We are therefore quite distressed you have been so dissatisfied with our service to date. By no means did we wish to cause you to feel maligned. Your Charms theory book will be given every consideration.

The enclosed sample is ready for your perusal. We believe it will make a handsome book cover. Please review and feel free to offer suggestions.

Best...

S.T.S.

P.S. If you prefer, we can also go with magenta.

Hermione put down the letter in her hand before tipping the bulky envelope and pulling out a stiff cardboard book cover done in eye-watering, poison green. It featured

three children skulking through a forest of tall trees. Each child's wand glowed with pretty colors.

Swearing, she whipped out her wand and set the cover on fire, then burned the letter and the envelope for good measure. The owl took off out the window with a screech, as if worried it would be next.

## Chapter 2

*Chapter 2 of 3*

Hermione gets to the bottom of the matter.

*Dear Hermione:*

*How delightful to hear from you after all these years! So you applied to Zauberberg for your graduate studies? I considered attending there on a scholarship, but then Oxford made its offer, and I'm afraid they lured me away.*

Hermione paused to indulge in a satisfying eye-roll. She never would have thought in a million years she would have occasion to write to Justin Finch-Fletchley, but her curiosity had led her far afield.

In the hopes of finding someone who might know the inside story on the peculiar goings-on at Sebastian & Sebalus Publishing, she had written to Luna Lovegood, who was hoping to finish the definitive work on nargles. Luna, it turned out, did not know anything about S&S, but referred her to Parvati Patil. Parvati, in turn, provided Justin's address. Hermione remembered Justin as being quite a gossipmonger at Hogwarts; surely he would deliver the scoop if anyone could.

*I look forward to the day we are both published authors! I don't know how much you've heard about my trilogy, but it is a work of historical fiction set in the era of the discovery of Gamp's Laws of Elemental Transfiguration. It is about a well-bred yet misunderstood young boy who comes of age against the backdrop of...*

"Erk," she gagged, skipping ahead until she found what she had been looking for.

*...not much to tell you on the subject of S&S Publishing. In all honesty, the first installment of my trilogy was declined four months ago, with virtually no word of explanation! All I received at first was a form letter, very crudely employed.*

*Well naturally, I demanded an interview with the editor, to ask for further explanation, which I felt was my due. But when I sat down with Snape, he did nothing but abuse me personally and call my story names it still pains me to think ab...*

Wait. Hermione blinked and went back a line. Snape? *Severus Snape* was an editor at S&S?

*...names it still pains me to think about and which I will not share with a member of the fairer sex. Suffice it to say, it took me back to our days in the Potions classrooms at Hogwarts. I am certain you remember him all too well, and that I need say no more! Our former Potions professor has not changed a bit.*

*I do not like to spread rumors, but I do happen to know that Sebastian Publishing had a difficult time gaining its feet when it first opened. It is still nowhere near financially solvent after six months. You would think they would be eager to acquire manuscripts for that reason, but do you know, they have not produced one book yet? Strange yet true!*

*However, lately Sebastian acquired a major new investor named Sebalus...someone who will force this Sebastian fellow to earn a return on his investment, and soon. So I imagine we will see a change over there in the near future.*

The letter closed with a promise from Justin to send her an autographed copy of his novel, just as soon as it was duly appreciated by the right publishing house. Hermione laid aside the parchment, deep in thought.

Justin had said a change had happened...a new investor whose name was added to the letterhead. And right after that, Hermione's book had been picked up, perhaps against this Mr. Sebastian's wishes. Perhaps the investor, this Sebalus person, was the one whose decision had netted Hermione her contract.

She was sure now that the seemingly contradictory letters from S.T. Sebastian were the result of the conflict going on between him and Sebalus.

And Snape? How did he factor into all of this?

The last she had heard of Severus Snape, he had been rescued from certain death after Voldemort had tried to execute him, but had lived in seclusion for a long time. After charges were finally dropped against him by the Wizengamot, Snape had disappeared from sight. Why had he now taken an editing job at a publishing house? Why wasn't he teaching anymore?

She stretched and yawned, suddenly fed up with the whole subject. She wondered if S&S was worth the energy she was investing in them. There was a respected publishing house here in Zauberberg...

No, damn it. Her first book belonged in Britain. She had a contract; for now, she would tough it out at S&S. She would think of something.

There was a knock on her door. "Hermione! Beeil dich! Sie warten schon auf der Veranda auf uns."

"Einen Moment!" she called. She bounded out of her chair with a laugh and grabbed her warmest cloak, all thoughts of troublesome publishers and former professors temporarily forgotten.

-oOo-

*To the staff at Sebastian & Sebalus Publishing,*

*Happy Christmas to all!*

*With affection...*

*Hermione Granger*

*P.S. Here we are...the Class of 2001! (I am third from the left.)*

The tiny picture featured a dozen or so young witches and wizards standing in a row on the front stoop of a venerable-looking grey edifice, all waving, laughing and stamping their feet in the cold.

Severus brought the photograph close enough to touch with his nose, then Summoned a magnifying glass and stared some more.

Lucius opened the door. "Severus, Narcissa wanted me to remind you..."

Severus snapped his head upward so hard he heard his neck creak. He slipped the glass to his lap. "Yes?"

Lucius arched an eyebrow. "...to come 'round at eight for drinks before dinner. What do you have there? Is that Miss Granger's class photograph? I saw it earlier." The eyebrow arched higher. "She's fairly attractive now, is she not?"

"Is she? I hadn't really noticed."

-o0o-

*Dear Miss Granger,*

*It is customary for a book to have a picture of the author on the back cover. Mrs. Arbuckle informs me she will require a few portrait photographs to choose from, of good resolution, including at least one full-length pose.*

*Sincerely,*

*S.T.S.*

-o0o-

*Dear Mr. Sebastian,*

*Enclosed are the photographs requested by Mrs. Arbuckle. Forgive me if you have been waiting by the owls window for my reply. I hope I didn't inconvenience you. As the first and only client of S&S, the obligation to be prompt in my correspondence weighs heavily upon me, for I know if I am late writing, you will have nothing else to do.*

"Bugger," murmured Severus. How the hell did Hermione Granger find out she was the only client at S&S? Now she would sense an edge over him. Now she'd never agree to leave and take her silly little book with her. Stubborn Gryffindors. He shook his head. If she weren't so willful, he thought with grudging admiration, this would almost be funny.

"Mrs. Arbuckle! I'll take a cup of tea."

"I am not your house-elf, Mr. Snape," came the tart reply. "There's a kettle and a box of Earl Grey in the kitchenette, unless William finished it off."

"I should fire you all and take on house-elves."

"La!" she laughed. "You couldn't afford house-elves on what you pay us."

Snape humphed and returned his attention to Hermione's letter.

*It seems to me that, with all the time you must have on your hands, you would have nothing better to do than, oh, I don't know...read the manuscript and see that it's not a children's book? But for whatever reason, Mr. S.T.S., you do not seem to want to take my work seriously. Therefore, I hereby issue you a challenge.*

*Pick any one of the practical examples in my book and attempt it yourself. I trust you to make bona fide effort to recreate my work.*

*If you find my Charms theory lacking, or if you cannot in all honesty replicate the results I achieved, then tell me so directly without threat of puppet shows and the like, and I will end our contract and take the book elsewhere.*

*But if you do find the results satisfactory, I hope you agree to work with me in a more cooperative spirit.*

*H.G.*

"Bugger," he said again. In spite of himself, he felt a pinprick of a guilty conscience at her last words. It might be that he had been slightly too hard on her. Though he had skimmed the entire book, he had dwelled more than anything on the autobiographical parts and had not devoted much attention to the bits where she nattered on about Charms theory. He supposed it was the fault of her being a former student, someone he could not envision as an adult and contributing member of society.

He turned his attention to the large envelope, tipping it and letting the photographs slide into his waiting hand. He studied each of them in turn, lingering on the full-length pose.

Perhaps he had been a bit hasty in dismissing her work.

-o0o-

For the second time in his life, Severus Snape stood in the December snow in the Forest of Dean, freezing his arse off and wondering about Hermione Granger.

To be absolutely sure to replicate her results, he had opted the next afternoon to come to the location in Britain she remarked in her manuscript was the site of one of her best successes...a nearly-unbreakable, soundproof protective enchantment for hiding in plain sight.

Now he pulled her draft out of his pocket. It had been pre-bound in unmarked grey cardboard, but he had dog-eared several pages of practical spells.

Licking his finger...which promptly froze...he turned to a page and pulled out his wand.

What is she studying these days?

Concentrate, Snape.

Does she always wear that matronly bun? How long is her hair now?

*Concentrate!*

"Oi, boss, we're freezing out here!"

Severus's wand arm dropped and he huffed in frustration. Word had gotten around quickly that Snape, a.k.a. Mr. Sebastian, was finally going to peer-review their one and only client's manuscript. Eager for a change of scenery, the rest of the staff had invited themselves along on the field trip.

Severus felt he should have ordered them to stay behind. But never in his life had he worked with adult subordinates. Most of them were older than him. Being in charge of a group of people who were neither children nor sociopathic Death Eaters threw him off his game a little.

Worse, they all seemed to be Hufflepuffs, the lot of them; insults rolled right off their backs. They were cheerful to a fault and tended to ignore his sour moods as they went about their daily business. He couldn't even threaten to dismiss them...they barely got any pay as it was. They were doing him a favor by staying on, and they knew it. So there was nothing for it but to let them tag along.

He walked back to where Amelia stood in the snow, chatting with her brother-in-law William and a knot of fidgety men and women. "Mrs. Arbuckle, perhaps you and the others should concentrate on replicating one of Miss Granger's new spells. The sooner we fail, the sooner we go back."

"Right-o, boss. Shall we start a fire, then?"

"Certainly, if you wish to."

He moved off to a more secluded spot, wincing at the boisterous sounds of an incipient snowball fight. Hufflepuffs.

*Now, Snape...concentrate.*

Holding the book in one hand, he muttered the spells in a low voice. *Cave Inimicum... Salvia Hexia... Muffliato... Repello Muggletum... Imperviumaris...* Wait. Can that be right? What does that one...?

It took several tries to get through the list in the right order, using the correct wand movements for each and taking pains to blend them the way she suggested. But at last, he was rewarded with a peculiar, soundless roar that caused his ears to feel pillowed in silence. Energy crackled between his fingers and the hair on his arms stood on end. The mixture of spells blended into a rich fusion of purpose such as he had never felt before.

William's watery blue eyes passed right over him and then returned to scan the area with mounting concern. *He's bloody disappeared*, mouthed the older man, and every pair of eyes turned to stare right through Severus, making his scalp crawl. Someone else actually walked forward, right toward Severus, but inexplicably veered off when she was only three feet away. No, they could not see him at all...could not even perceive the shield itself; he stood alone in the snow, completely disguised and unwillingly enchanted by Hermione's spell.

She had done this all by herself, as a mere student. She had invented a new...well, not a new spell, exactly, but a new result to a combination of old spells. Severus could not remember ever being so impressed with another human being in his life.

At last, he waved his wand and spoke the word that tore down the enchantment. Bemused, he walked back to the group. There was a sound of excited voices, and above them came an unholy screech from his editor.

"What th'...bloody hell!" cried Amelia. "Will you look at this?"

Amelia was peering into her large, ugly leopard-print handbag. She reached a hand in ... and kept on reaching, all the way up to her shoulder. No arm appeared below.

Someone whistled in amazement. Severus was surprised to realize it had been him.

-oOo-

*Dear Miss Granger:*

*The editors have informed me they feel the theory is sound enough to proceed apace in publishing your work as an academic, rather than popular, work. We shall continue in that vein for the time being.*

*Enclosed is a new draft book cover.*

*Sincerely,*

*Severus Tobias Snape*

*P.S. We could also go with red and gold, but I thought the colors vulgar.*

Hermione held the rich blue book cover up to the candlelight to admire the silver letters that played across its face. At that moment, it was the most handsome thing she had ever beheld. Her very first book cover. And not one skulking child to be found.

Success.

She smiled to herself, already composing the next letter to her challenging publisher, S.T. Snape.

-oOo-

*A/N: "Beeil dich! Sie warten schon auf der Veranda auf uns," roughly translated, means "Hurry up! They're already waiting for us on the porch." A lovely reader fixed my German. Thank you, Serena!*

## Chapter 3

Will no one think of the owls?

*... had been prepared to be attacked by the Dark Lord or any one of my distinguished colleagues. In fact, I had been preparing for an attempt on my life for years. Why does that always surprise people when I say this? I was a Potions master and a Death-Eater, for Merlin's sake. But every time I tell my story, it's like dLumos goes off behind their eyes and they are suddenly given to understand the Slytherin instinct for self-preservation.*

*But you, Granger, should have had more confidence in me. I would have expected you to catch on. Five points from Gryffindor. Do pay closer attention next time.*

-o0o-

*I have to say, this is the first time anyone's made me laugh over the story of their own near-death experience. Is it because we're corresponding, and I don't have to cower under the dreadful scowl I remember from my school days? Or have you always had a sense of humor and I simply never knew?*

*Naturally, if anyone has the right to set the narrative tone of their own near-death experience, it is the near-deathee. (Is that a word?) (It is now.) (Right. No more wine after this glass, Hermione, I mean it.)*

*But I confess it's still difficult to get over the way Minerva stood in front of me and let me believe you were dead. Defend her all you wish, but you don't know what it felt like.*

*One day, about a month after the final battle, many of us had gathered at Hogwarts for a small ceremony before reconstruction of the castle was to begin. Looking around me, I was suddenly overwhelmed by the memories. Minerva happened by then, and she put her arm around me and we went off to talk for a while. I sat in her office for I don't know how long, and stared at your portrait, and unburdened myself about the whole thing...witnessing your attack, hearing what we had thought were your last words, making the hard choice to leave you because we were running out of time.*

*She tried to be a comfort that day, and I appreciate it. But now, come to find out she knew you were alive all the time? I love her; she continues in my heart as my first, best mentor, but if she were here right now ...*

-o0o-

*I'm genuinely sorry, Hermione. Aberforth and I thought the secret of my survival was too volatile to share in those first days. The habits of an old spy die hard; sometimes I forget I don't know everything. Still, if I had known you were hurt, maybe I would have taken a chance. I don't know.*

*If it makes you feel any better, Minerva had no choice in the matter. Aberforth had made her take a Binding Oath before he would reveal to her that I lived. Then he brought her out to his Secret-kept cottage near Hogsmeade.*

*I will not attempt to recreate her reaction upon seeing me all bandaged up, eyes open, very much alive. One word can describe her emotionsmixed.*

*As for the portrait in the Headmasters gallery, I'm glad to hear it fooled you. It was supposed fool any casual observer. Between M. and A., it was a very clever piece of charms work and looked just like me, except it did not snore as loudly as I.*

*But as for how the charms were applied, I shall leave this story for another day, as it's past your bedtime, young lady.*

-o0o-

*Very funny. How do you know what time of day I read your letters? You may have your owl deliver at ungodly hours, but I myself am possessed of such rock-solid discipline, I always save your letters for my leisure time.*

*Did Amelia receive my latest edits? It wouldn't surprise me if she were leaving it to you to keep the client informed, and you were shirking your responsibility by filling our hours with small talk.*

-o0o-

*My thrilling tale is not small talk, Granger. I'll thank you to keep a civil tongue. Or rather, pen.*

*Have you had any more thought about multi-lingual charms applications? If you have gotten to Volume III of Marlsburg, you will already know her theorem, which states ...*

-o0o-

*... had not noticed any difference between results when spoken in English (or rather, Latin) and in German. Not that my German accent is all that good...far from it! So I enlisted the help of my classmates. And sure enough, we saw no appreciable difference. It leads me to have more confidence in what you said back in February...the timing of the incantation has to do more with intent and focus, and less on the length of any given spell.*

*Perhaps my findings will be applicable in various languages. I say, Mister Publisher sir, when can we translate my book into German?*

*Yes, I'm getting ahead of myself. No, you do not mind, though you'll say you do.*

*Enclosed are notes from the Concealments and Revealmements seminar I attended yesterday, led by Master Augustus Schwimmer. Apparently, he was once a bright young thing at the Wiesbaden Academy. Did you know him when you attended? I boiled down three hours' worth of lecture into a few succinct pages. You may commence with expressions of sincere and boundless gratitude.*

-o0o-

*Schwimmer was nothing but a windbag back when I attended university with him in Prague. You deserve a medal, not just my sincere and boundless, etc.*

*Thank you for the notes. Please let me know how I may repay you. And be as creative as you wish.*

-o0o-

*... he invited me out at last. He says he noticed me at the lecture. Can't imagine why. I was sitting clear in the back. The man must have eyes like an eagle!*

*Why did you call him a windbag? I find him quite interesting.*

*See here, once again I have nattered on at you about trivial things. I have half a mind not to send this at all.*



*Oh! Here is your owl! I shall take it as a sign then, for better or worse. Off you go...*

-o0o-

*How long have you had your eye on Schwimmer? Is it a professor thing? He taught your class three hours, Granger. I was your professor for six years. I am slightly hurt I'm not in the running.*

-o0o-

*Ha! You mean my publisher, S.T. Sebastian, the man who made poor Justin cry and then threatened to turn my thesis into a children's book? What the professor you believe ought to be in the running?*

-o0o-

*...Apparently, she has been shopping the thing to every broom-cupboard conspiracy theorist with a printing press. No one would touch it, not even that rag The Quibbler. Did I mention the Daily Prophet passed on it? Yes, eventually they have finally gained some common sense. It was one thing to let her print excerpts from her Dumbledore biography; it's quite another to make spurious claims about a living person. One of their attorneys no doubt informed them if they put their masthead above any of the mendacities that comprised her so-called 'biography,' I would sue them for slander. Or libel. Whichever it is.*

*You may ask how I know for a fact she has written mendacities about me. It is because Skeeter had no luck finding an agency ... until she came to the front stoop of Sebastian & Sebalus Publishing.*

*Who is this Sebastian & Sebalus Publishing, you may ask? Oh, just some one-owl operation with a small shop front in Hyperb Alley. You may not have heard of them. The publisher, an irascible fellow by all accounts, prefers to keep a very low profile...so much so, he made up fictitious "publishers" as a front so he would not have to deal directly with a public that still tends to censure him for his actions during the war. This publisher fellow has only been in business a year, but he has already managed to sign a book contract with an up-and-coming young charms theorist from Switzerland, and three or four others as well ...*

-o0o-

*Oh, Severus, have you signed new clients at last? I'm so glad! Who are the others? Did you relent and pick up Justin's epic trilogy? I do hope so. He promised me an autographed copy...*

-o0o-

*...S&S probably seemed like a good prospect to Rita Skeeter. It helped that the associate editor, starry-eyed in the presence of such a famous writer, wasted no time in offering her a special contract that very day. (Must remember to give Amelia a bonus for her performance.)*

*We've stopped production on all other works (including yours...my apologies) long enough to print the book. But just two copies. Unfortunately, one of them will fall into the hands of Severus Snape himself, and the other, his attorney, D. Malfoy, Esq.*

*The results should be brutal. Draco assures me the contract is iron-clad. Amelia really rushed her through the fine print. In the end, she will have to cede all rights to the injured party, Severus Snape, and the fool book will die a well-deserved death.*

*We most certainly did not sign Mr. Fletch-Fitchley and his piece of vanity fiction. As for our client list, watch for a catalogue this summer.*

-o0o-

*You are dangerous to know, Mr. Snape! Remind me to tell you about the time I had occasion to blackmail Rita Skeeter. You and I should start a club. We could be charter members.*

*It's late, and finals week starts next Monday, but I can't sleep. I used to have a large bottle Dreamless Sleep, which I brought with me from Britain, but unfortunately, it's finally all used up after three years here. I would brew my own (at the tiny little work station I set up here in my dormitory), but for some strange reason the apothecary in Zurich only carries blue asphodel, which I find is not as effective.*

*Perhaps some common asphodel as a token of your sincere and boundless, etc?*

*Hoping you are well...and fast asleep, too...*

-o0o-

To Hermione Granger

From Slug & Jigger's Apothecary

Diagon Alley, London

Item: Essence of Asphodel, Common (3 bottles)

Amount due: 0

Note: *Why are you having trouble sleeping, Granger?*

-o0o-

*Thank you so much, Severus. I should have ordered common asphodel from Britain, but somehow I never got around to it.*

*You ask why I sometimes have trouble sleeping. I suppose it has to do with what happened with my parents. Maybe there's a part of me that feels I deserve to have insomnia.*

*I wasn't completely honest with you in earlier letters about the fate of Abraham and Jean Granger. I told you they moved to Australia during the war to stay safe. The truth is, I coerced them into moving. They would never have taken themselves out of harm's way if they knew their daughter was resolved to remain in Britain, fighting a war against impossible odds. I knew it just wasn't in them to leave me.*

*So I used an Obliviate charm to make them forget they ever had a daughter. From there, it was a simple matter to plant a small suggestion in their heads to move out of the country. They'd always wanted to emigrate...they'd dreamed of it for as long as I can remember.*

*A few months after the war ended, I went to Sydney and found them. But when I tried to reverse the spell, I discovered I could not. Everyone learns Oblivates in sixth year, Severus, but nobody learns how to reverse them.*

*I threw myself into research. I expect this may be one of the reasons why I enrolled at Zaubenberg...to become proficient enough at Charms theory that I could finally devise a way to reverse my parents' amnesia. To date, though, I have had no breakthroughs. My advisors and professors are equally stymied and have been unable to offer any insights.*

*How do you like that? The most important charm of my life is the one that does not make the cut.*

*Well, I know they're happy where they are, at least. That will have to be enough, won't it?*

H.

*P.S. Schwimmer is a windbag.*

-o0o-

*So this is why you took up the study of Charms theory. Ah, Hermione. Sometimes the happiness of others must come at the expense of our own. I fear you know this better than most. But as we move on after a hard choice, we keep within us the certainty that, faced with the two paths, we would choose the same one again, the one with the best odds of keeping our loved ones safe.*

*You picked the choice that was best at the time. Don't fall into the trap of second-guessing your choice in light of hardship now.*

*As you say, they are happy. You've given them a future to look forward to. And you have a bright future ahead of you as well. Look to the future.*

S.

-o0o-

Spring lent her gracious charm to the graduation ceremony held on the bright, rolling lawns of Zaubenberg. The sun's rays were a benediction all their own, and blue-grey mountains surrounded the little valley, craggy sentinels which had stood for all time.

"Hermione Jean Granger."

Hermione mounted the stage and walked toward the provost. The audience, seated in precise rows, clapped politely. She shook a proffered hand and accepted her diploma, smiling at her professors, arrayed on the dais, before she descended again.

As she made her way back to her seat, she lifted her eyes to the hills again and briefly considered turning left instead of right and skipping the rest of the ceremony. After all, she had her diploma now. But no: her classmates were grinning and beckoning her back to her chair, as if they had sensed her thoughts. Smiling ruefully, she regained her seat on the end of the row, and somebody poked her in the arm good-naturedly.

On the dais, Master Augustus Schwimmer took his place behind the podium, used his wand to magically enhance his voice, and launched into what promised to be a long-winded speech. The whole class suppressed groans. Shaking her head, Hermione looked about and let her mind wander.

For such a small graduating class, attendance was quite large. Every student could boast more than a few friends and family members in attendance, except for Hermione.

None of her friends had been able to make the trip from England. Harry and Ginny had wanted to come, but Ginny was due any day now with their second-born and could not travel. Ron had bowed out too, not wanting to cause trouble with his wife. Hermione didn't know what to think about that, except to hope Lavender's residual jealousy where Hermione was concerned would ease up over time.

And her parents ... No, best not to think about them again today. Look to the future, he had said, and she would.

Her advisors and professors had offered her a post-graduate fellowship at Zaubenberg, which would enable her to continue her research on Obliviate reversals. It was a generous offer, one she intended to take them up on. But first, an extended visit to London was in order, to visit her friends and perhaps see if there was certain someone who might be waiting for her to find him in Hyperb Alley...

Another poke on the arm, this time from the other side. Hermione turned to see a book nudging her shoulder. It floated into her hands. Surprise and delight welled up in her heart as she admired its beautiful dark blue cover set with silver words...her own name...glinting in the May sunlight.

The front cover flipped open of its own accord...there was her name again upon the flyleaf...and a white quill came floating around to hover near her other hand.

"Pardon me, Miss Granger, may I have your autograph?"

His low, whispered words in her ear made her shiver delightfully. She had thought of him, and he had come. She turned in her seat and beheld Severus Snape sitting behind her.

He was dressed in charcoal-gray linen robes of European cut, trimmed with innumerable silver buttons which she fondly recognized as his hallmark. His hair was tied back in a queue, framing the lined face she remembered with perfect clarity from her youth ... except this face seemed new to her, for it wore a self-deprecating smile that made him seem downright sexy, and black eyes that glowed warmly, just for her.

He had come, just for her.

Impulsively, she reached back to touch his cheek, as much to stop him disappearing from sight as to reassure herself he was real. His smile grew tender at her touch; she realized he had been a little unsure of his welcome, and her heart melted.

"Oh, Severus," she whispered, overcome, "I'm so glad to see you." She gently coaxed him nearer to kiss his cheek, but her kiss landed somewhat on his mouth, and she thought she ought to be embarrassed, but he tilted his head and kissed her properly and all thoughts scattered as she breathed him in.

At the sound of his chuckle, she twisted and threw her arms around his neck, knocking her chair aside. He stood and hugged her so tightly about the waist, her feet left the ground. She laughed and he kissed her again, heedless of the murmuring crowd.

"Is that you, Sevvy?" called Master Schwimmer from the stage. "Good to see you, but I must say, you're interrupting my speech."

FIN

-o0o-

*A/N: I had a great time writing this story for the SSHG Promptfest, after the following prompt set by tophoenix: "Hermione is writing a book - preferably an academic one, possibly not a silly thing - and Snape is the mysterious editor behind the firm that has signed a contract with her in order to publish it. Correspondence ensues, bickering,*

*bantering and, very slowly, understanding and love, until the deserved HEA. (SSHG or SS/HG)"*