

The Silver Spoon Question

by Fairfield

An old document is examined.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 of 5

An old document is examined.

Chapter 1

"That's the most harebrained thing I've ever heard."

"Sir? I think it's authentic, sir," said Hermione.

"Are you telling me that Salazar Slytherin won the Iron Chef competition at Hogwarts in 1022?" asked Severus.

"Yes sir, fragments of his recipes are still on this award certificate."

Stew

Take a snorkack from the wild

Add three nargles with their leer.

Chop the mushrooms coarse, my child,

And don't forget the butterbeer.

"Butterbeer?" he asked.

"That's one of the things that make me think it's authentic, sir. No one could make up anything that outrageous," said Hermione. "There's another fragment, sir."

Mixed Grill

Find free range bulls that feed on grass

With proud long pizzles on parade.

With sharp knife, take their best, my lass

And prepare hot coals in the shade.

Next shake up the butterbeer

"The rest seems to be lost, sir," said Hermione.

"Thank the gods for that," said Severus, "but why are you showing me this tasteless hoax?"

"Here's the clincher, sir. The prize was a silver spoon and a bottle of lotion."

"And so?"

"That's why everyone in Gryffindor believes the document is a fake with a forged signature. No one believes Salazar would use something as wimpy as a spoon, sir. Nor do they believe he would use a lotion."

"I use a spoon," said Severus.

"Yes, sir. I know, sir. And one of the recipes was a stew," she said.

I think I better not mention the lotion, she thought.

"Think of the honor of retrieving this artifact," said Hermione.

"You're saying that beside the Gryffindor sword that slew the Lake Monster, the Hufflepuff spade that turned the first ground for the school, and the Ravenclaw tiara worn by Rowena on the opening of Hogwarts, we could place the silver spoon won by Salazar in the butterbeer contest of 1022."

"Yes, sir, the Iron Chef contest," said Hermione.

"Be still my beating heart."

"But I think it exists. If nothing else, everyone in my house is laughing at it."

"I see," said Severus. "You want to play the stock-market game. Find out where the dumb money is going and do the opposite."

"Will you help me?" asked Hermione.

"Will you tell anyone if I do?"

"No, sir."

"Will you still respect me in the morning?"

"Yes, sir."

Combining two prompts from MuseAmusant:

(1) A forged signature, a silver spoon, a bottle of lotion.

(2) Iron Chef: Hogwarts Edition – The secret ingredient is butterbeer.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 of 5

The pair goes searching for artifacts.

Chapter 2

Heart harder than feet descending stairs. Pain wider than doors flinging open.

"You went without me," she said. "Sir."

"I popped up to check the terrain and weather," he said. "Did you expect me to go on an expedition like a mindless, well, whatever?"

"Like a mindless Gryffindor? Is that what you were going to say, sir?"

"Do you still think, Miss Granger, that we can be successful partners?"

"We're all we have, sir. And you could have taken me with you. Harry's with Dumbledore, Ron's with Lavender, and no one would have missed me."

"I might have missed you," said Severus. *What am I saying?*

He watched the emotions play across her face, thinking that Gryffies would never be poker players. He told her that he had only checked on one of the sites used by Salazar, one in a forest where there was once Druid activity. He was certain there were more since Salazar used to watch the coast for Viking raiders and the South for Christian expeditions. They might have to physically hunt for these since the records were poor. They could explore together with the coast next, and its danger and hardship would make up for the easy trip to a forest that she had missed. Besides, he had merely located but hadn't searched the forest cabin. A smile replaced her scowl of anger and disappointment. He thought about the proclivities of her house, thought about how pleasant it was to make her smile, and thought about how lonely men had strange thoughts.

The next Saturday saw Severus cruising along the coast with his wand sweeping back and forth like a search-radar. It saw Hermione buffeted by gusts and clinging to her broom. He signaled and descended to a spot that was now glowing blue. After landing, he observed Hermione coming in, aimed his wand, and levitated her to the ground. He pried the stiff fingers of the blue-lipped girl from the broom and walked her into the hut.

"Success," he said, handing her a cup of hot chocolate laced with brandy.

"I'm holding you back," she finally managed to say.

"Au contraire, this outpost is close to the location you picked, a good position for a watchtower," he said. "I could have searched for days otherwise. We'll mark it on our map and head back before you're missed."

She shook her head sadly.

The thought of her not being missed gave him no pleasure, but he decided to act positive. "We can look for another next Saturday, about the time you've thawed out."

"We mustn't let me get warm and cozy, do we, sir?"

"That would violate the rules of questing," he said. "The gods of adventure would not be pleased."

Sarcasm one can count on, thought Hermione. A steady beacon in an uncertain world.

Sunday morning at the breakfast table, Filius said, "You and Miss Granger were gone yesterday."

"Does nothing escape your eagle eye?" asked Severus.

"Lots, but she should have been a Ravenclaw." Filius stared into the distance. "Careful, Severus, intelligent women can grow on you."

Hermione, too, was staring into the bleak distance until she noticed Severus whereupon her expression turned soft and warm.

Severus became thoroughly occupied with getting some marmalade on his toast.

That Friday evening, they examined the scraps of ancient maps they had found in various places around the school.

"We might examine the South," suggested Severus.

"There must be a good reason you didn't start there first where the climate is more moderate," said Hermione. "What is it, sir?"

"Must I always suffer your accursed intelligence?"

"For ever and ever, sir." *What am I saying?* "Tell me."

"I found some chapters that didn't make it into the official history," he said. "Salazar may have spied on the Christians by posing as an itinerant monk. Can you guess the rest, oh brilliant one?"

"It was a time when disease was mysterious, from evil spirits," said Hermione. "With a few spells and potions, Salazar could pretend to pray for someone's soul and perform a miracle." She paused. "But that should have made it into the official history although if Salazar is persona-non-grata, they may have pretended it was some unknown wizard. But no version appeared because no one was able to gloss over what is now considered politically incorrect."

"Keep going," said Severus.

"Salazar only healed the rich and powerful. From them, he received enough monies to support himself while spying, and from them, in a moment consisting of their relief, gratitude, and trust, he discovered all their plans for their campaigns against the wizards."

Hermione basked in Severus's approval.

"Hence," she said, "we will discover nothing in the South since Salazar was too clever to leave any revealing traces."

She smiled. "A true Slytherin, sir."

"Are you trying to be sarcastic?"

"I wouldn't dare, sir."

Hermione was not to be restrained. "That means our next trip will be more fun exploring the Northern coast."

She considered the next round of entertainment. "Do you have any warm clothes I can borrow? And a better-behaved broom, sir?"

Author's Note: Severus-Hermione never seemed viable to me, and the original intent of this chapter was to give this story an erotic ending, but the pairing appears to be a tough couple.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 of 5

Severus Meets Temptation

The noonday sun on the day before Christmas turned an overcast sky a pale white before seeping through the window and onto the book held by one Severus Snape who was lost in his own reverie. Everything was going awry.

Before the term had begun, he had devised a plan of revenge against that frizzy-haired witch. He would let Draco Malfoy discover his old Potion book which would let him outperform all the other students, especially that over-achieving female. It would be subtle retribution since the teacher's pet wouldn't be able to deviate from the prescribed text even though it was inferior. That would be fun to watch. Unfortunately, the Nameless One had concocted a scheme that turned Draco into a wreck barely able to function, and even worse, Harry Potter had retrieved the book. Well, that should have been even more subtle fun as her friend outperformed her, but the frizzy-haired one had enticed him into a quest for Salazar Slytherin's lost artifacts, and for reasons beyond understanding, he was sympathizing with his archeology partner instead of gloating over her distress as he should be. Nothing beat the Dark Lord and the Gryffindors for taking the fun out of life.

He was taking consolation in thinking things couldn't get any worse when the doorbell rang.

"Hello, Bellatrix, what brings you out this glorious day?"

"I'm going spare hanging around Malfoy Manor," she said.

"Drab surroundings will do that," he replied. "Perhaps some time in my luxurious parlor will restore your joie de vivre. Would madam enjoy a tea?"

"Do you have any coffee?"

"I see that madam, indeed, has a despondency of the spirit. Let me make a quick trip to the corner grocery."

Ten minutes later, Severus emerged from the kitchen carrying a tray of coffee and sticky-buns. He poured and served.

"Perhaps if madam unburdened herself," he suggested.

"How do you do it, Severus?" she asked. "You survive everything without a scratch, you're the Dark Lord's favorite, and for a grand finale, you convinced Miss Granger, of all people, to join you in locating ancient Slytherin treasures."

"I'm barely limping along," he said. *So much for our activities being secret.*

"Your false modesty is infuriating," said Bellatrix. "Have you weaseled your way into her pants yet?"

The last question brought such a flood of emotion that Severus was temporarily speechless, but luckily, Bellatrix was intent upon her own designs.

She joined him on the sofa. "I bet you could weasel your way into any lady's pants if you tried."

He was thinking that this was a power play. If she was out of favor with the chief, she would cozy up to his lieutenant. She would believe that, given a taste of her tush, her pureblood tush, he would be at her feet, at her beck and call. Being in his current lonely state and seeking a distraction from his unwanted feelings for Hermione, she might be correct. This was scary. He had to divert her.

"I think an amorous adventure would do you good," he said.

"Yes," she breathed hoarsely, moving closer.

"In fact, many amorous flings might be the cure," he said. "Let's work on it."

"What?" she asked. "What are you saying?"

"I'm saying that a lady of your passion needs many lovers," he said, "many."

"I had just one in mind."

"You under rate yourself," he said.

"Do you think so?" she asked.

"Of course. Imagine what one lover could give you. Now imagine what a platoon of lovers could give you. Riches. Power."

"I've been short sighted. It would be niggardly of me to deprive wizardkind of my favors," she said, "but how does one go about it?"

"Discreet ads," he said. "Simply describe what you are looking for."

A few moments later, she showed Severus her first effort.

Ferocious female seeks ruler of an Empire, preferably Dark. S&M in foreplay a must. Will return devotion for cruel treatment.

"That's too identifying. Everyone will know it's you," he said, "which brings up the point: how can you safely mingle with others."

"I can use a glamour."

"But what if everything is successful?" he asked. "What if you lose control at the ultimate moment? Wouldn't that identify you?"

"I'm safe even then," she replied. "No one knows what I'm like at the ultimate moment, as you put it, not even me."

"Indeed," said Severus.

Severus read her ad again. "This is the old you. You're here because you feel something is missing from your life. Perhaps you've matured and torturing the helpless no longer satisfies all your emotional needs."

Bellatrix put her will and quill into the next effort.

Willing witch will wiggle wantonly while wallowing with wild wicked ways.

Severus shook his head. "That's so yesterday."

Bellatrix sighed. "You're right. I need something for this dignified era in which we are now living."

They reviewed her strong points, what she might bring to a relationship.

Consort of a Dark Wizard, he thought, but he let his mind stretch and suggested being a companion of a champion. She hesitated. That was too big a change. He disagreed. It was only in books for children that there was a difference between the forces of light and the forces of darkness. Well, children and the general public, he amended.

"Do you think I could pull it off?" she asked.

He mentioned she would have to adapt to a different type of bonding. A champion would openly admire her competence and bravery instead of abusing her into developing an inner core of self-sufficiency. He would be prone to helping her, and she would have to learn to share her burden instead of pitting her lone mettle against the opposing forces. Most likely, he would come to appreciate her character and become attached to her.

"I'm not ready for that," she said.

"You might grow into it," he offered.

She brightened. "I know, married men. I hear there's an abundant supply."

"That might fit your present stage of development," said Severus.

She continued. "All those clandestine meetings over the lunch hour – a quick, refreshing break, a pleasant grind before the afternoon grind. Occasionally, wifey will be out of town with the kids, and he can have me on his kitchen table. Just think, every time after that, when he sits down to dinner with his family, he'll have flashbacks of getting my feet in the air, and as he bites into the evening rump roast, his groin will tighten as he remembers my intimate clenches that caused him to spurt uncontrollably."

She took a deep breath. "That's spicy. That's what I need."

"I think we're gaining insight here," said Severus.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 of 5

Hermione raids the manor and hears an elf saga.

"Narcissa is coming over for tea this afternoon."

"She is? What for?"

"I assume she's grown tired of the dreary Malfoy manor," said Severus.

"Yes, sir. That must be it, sir," said Hermione, taking in the splendor of Severus's parlor with its view of a brick wall across the street. She could think of only one thing in the room that wasn't drab, definitely not drab.

She knew what he was thinking. Their search had turned up several locked trunks they believed belonged to Salazar, and it was an ideal time to steal the sets of keys that Dobby had assured them had been in the dungeons for ages and that the Malfoys had forgotten. She told herself that was why he had agreed to have tea with Mrs. Malfoy. She couldn't think of a diplomatic way of suggesting they just knock the lady unconscious and toss her in a ditch for a while.

"Why me?" she asked.

"You don't want a professor to get caught raiding the manor, do you?" asked Severus. "Besides, what's the greater challenge, facing the dangers of a hellhole or facing Narcissa Malfoy for tea? Answer as a true Gryffindor."

I've got to learn how to argue better, thought Hermione.

"Goodbye, Hermione," he said as she was leaving.

"What was that for, sir?" she asked.

"In case your mission is perilous and you don't return, I want to give you a proper farewell."

Hermione growled and slammed the door shut.

On her way to meet Dobby, she remembered her last conversation with the elf.

"Dobby is sorry. Dobby didn't find the silver spoon," he had said.

"And I thought they were all born with one," she had replied.

Dobby had looked confused and had offered, with a tear in his eye, to give back a sock for his failure to find the eating utensil. He had held it out.

"That's a mitten," she had said.

"Dobby is offering his favorite sock, the one with a special place for Dobby's big toe," he had said. "Miss Hermione is so clever."

"Yes. Thanks. Glad you like it. I think you should keep it," she had said.

An hour later, at the manor, Hermione heard Dobby say, "Coast is clear."

Hermione had been thinking about how the elegant Mrs. Malfoy would make her stately entrance into Snape's parlor, not like the clumsy appearance of a schoolgirl, and about how Mrs. Malfoy would make a few well-chosen remarks to put Snape at his ease, not like the awkward comments of a student.

A little later, Dobby said, "Dobby has found the dungeons. Dobby's opened the doors to the chambers of torture and death."

"Marvelous," said Hermione.

She was thinking about how Mrs. Malfoy would converse about mature matters that no schoolgirl had been exposed to and about how Mrs. Malfoy would artfully draw

Severus out and have him revealing confidences that he would never mention to a student.

Dobby located the ancient sets of key, and they were about to leave when he spied a decrepit object amongst the clutter. He cried out and ran to it. He seized it and held it reverently.

Hermione was about to ask what was special about an old pickax when the strangest thing happened.

The small elf lifted the object high and stood transfixed for a moment before he held forth.

Hear this oft-told tale of Salazar
Hero wizard who came from afar.
Who stood alone against evil trolls,
Head-bashing, bone-crushing, deadly foes.
He swore a fine oath: They Shall Not Pass.
He was determined to kick some ass.
Despite his passion, he was no fool.
For this brave quest, he needed a tool.
He labored long and was never lax.
He made the finest pick of the ax.
To save the tribe and many a friend,
He was ready to risk his own end.
He met the trolls, a ferocious pair,
That swung mighty fists that split the air.
He ducked and rolled and came up behind
To strike a blow of the bunghole kind
Skeptics among us may state their brief
And say such deeds are beyond belief.
But the story told we can defend.
The troll did feel that sharp, pointy end.
For here's the proof that we all can trust:
That part of the pickax stained with rust.
The first troll yowled and felt a bit ill.
Salazar gave the next one his fill.
He swung at it hard and scored a hit,
But the second troll was tough and fit.
Knocked away like a leaf in the breeze,
Salazar went sailing through the trees.
But he rallied fast and came on strong.
He had given his vow to right this wrong.
The troll was big and strong for its size.
Salazar leaped to take out its eyes.
As the pickax struck and did his will,
The twice-cursed troll flung him over the hill.
He came right back and gave them their doom.
He sent the trolls to their final tomb.
He left the battle with honor due
To come back home to his work so true.
When he returned, there was a delay,
For healing took a year and a day.

Dobby stood spellbound with the artifact still raised above his head. Hermione waited. She wasn't about to touch that implement of destruction, that essence of Slytherin.

Dobby finally put the pickax down and grinned. "Is famous saga. Favorite among elves."

"I can see why it would be," said Hermione. *Why isn't that in the official history? What else do the elves know that we don't?*

"Bring it along, Dobby," she said, wondering if the pickax was worth placing beside the silver spoon, if they ever found the silver spoon, and thinking it would be a strange juxtaposition. Perhaps if it was cleaned up a bit.

Torn between being afraid that Mrs. Malfoy would return any moment and being afraid that Mrs. Malfoy was still with Severus, Hermione closed the doors behind her, and she and the elf hurried away from the manor.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 of 5

A discovery leads to the end of the quest.

Chapter 5

"What are you doing with Hermione?"

"Good morning, Molly. Would you like to come in for a spot of tea?"

"You're not going to put me off by faking good manners."

"Of course not," said Severus. "I'm not even going to be particularly hospitable. All I'm going to offer you is oolong tea with sunflower seeds."

"Overlong?" asked Molly. "You steeped it too long?"

Severus explained that oolong was a Chinese variety, and he had developed a taste for it since handling some manuscripts with a tale about Salazar's father, Sebastian, who had intervened between the dragon Yu Long and a Chinese prefect Di Renjie, or was it the other way around. The manuscript was in Olde Englishe and not easy to read.

Molly gave her tea a dubious look. "You're letting a young girl handle magical manuscripts that give a person strange desires?"

"I didn't let her touch them," said Severus.

As he took her cloak, he noticed a Department of Mysteries Badge on it. The reason for Molly Weasley having one of those wasn't easy to read either.

"You mean, you let her do the dangerous work of getting the treasures, and then you keep them from her?" asked Molly.

There was a short pause before Molly asked Severus why he was chuckling. She didn't see anything funny about exposing a student to danger and cheating her.

"Where's the cream and sugar?" asked Molly. "You were right about not being hospitable, and Hermione belongs with Ron."

Severus replied that Lavender Brown might have another opinion. Molly asserted that was only superficial sex and Ron would soon grow tired of it. Severus was thinking that Ron was a strange boy. He thought about Ron having a little superficial sex with Hermione and decided that the next time he saw Ron he would remind the boy how lucky he was to have found someone as precious as Lavender. "Don't give her up. She's a jewel."

Molly was protesting that an innocent young girl should not be put in jeopardy from evil artifacts that, the gods only knew, had strange powers. Severus was saying that Hermione's primary activity was collecting tales from the era.

"She's spending time in the Restricted Section," said Molly. "You've got to keep her out of there."

Severus was saying that the elves seemed to have an extensive oral tradition. Molly was arguing that they were twisted narratives that would have an insidious influence on a naïve mind. Severus had never believed young girls ever had a naïve mind, and he was about to ask Molly about her mind at that age, but he thought better of it and only asserted that the elf stories were straightforward accounts of adventures.

Molly clinched her argument. "You can't claim your tales have merit if they don't have a moral."

Severus remembered the troll saga and thought *Don't expose your backside to Salazar*. He rendered the expurgated version. "Don't turn your back on a Slytherin."

"Maybe there's some value in those old stories after all," said Molly.

Perhaps Molly is the Mystery, thought Severus.

"Molly was here," said Severus.

"Was she trying to reassure everyone about Ron's honest intentions again?" asked Hermione.

Severus walked around the land mine and said, "She's concerned about your spending time in the Restricted Section."

Hermione considered that tidbit. "What do we know about administrations, sir? By doing the opposite, we can't go wrong."

"But she has a point," said Severus. "I'm exposing a student to danger."

"Au contraire, sir, being aware of my irrepressible curiosity and the dangers of my acting alone, you have decided to accompany me to keep me from harm as a responsible professor should."

A little while later, the two were deeper in the Restricted Section than they had ever been before.

Severus was considering a painting covered with cloth that they hadn't noticed before and said, "We've been looking in books but haven't found anything."

Hermione removed the cloth and stepped back. "It's Salazar."

She looked again. "And an elf. The elf is wearing armor."

Severus waved his wand for the incantations used to restore castle portraits that had lost their vigor, but nothing happened. Finally, Hermione stood before the artifact and declaimed.

Hear this oft-told tale of Salazar

Hero wizard who came from afar.

Who stood alone against evil trolls,

Head-bashing, bone-crushing, deadly foes.

He swore a fine oath: They Shall Not Pass.

He was determined to kick some ass.

"Damn right, he kicked some ass," said the elf, "but he didn't come from that far away, and he sure as hell wasn't alone," whereupon the elf beat on his shield with what appeared to be a huge meat cleaver.

Hermione was thinking that Salazar was more egalitarian than portrayed. She was also thinking the elf might be a tough customer.

Severus spoke. "I'm Professor Snape."

"Sir Reginald van de Jan," replied the elf. "I assume you recognize Salazar Slytherin, a Lord of Hogwarts."

"Can't he speak?" asked Hermione, glancing at the Salazar image that seemed to be both glaring at them and sizing them up.

"What makes you think that Lord Salazar would address one such as you?" asked Sir Reginald.

Maybe Salazar isn't as egalitarian as I assumed, thought Hermione.

"It was a different age," said Severus as if reading her mind.

"Is it only you two who have come before us?" asked the elf.

"Just us," said Hermione.

The elf gripped his cleaver and shifted his stance.

"Just us, Sir Reginald," said Hermione.

"You live in diminished times," asserted Sir Reginald, "but I'm certain the elves have composed an epic poem about the decline that stirs the very fibre of our beings. What do they call it?"

"I'm sorry," said Hermione. "I don't know it."

Sir Reginald looked puzzled. "You are well past the age to hear great literature. Ah, I understand. You're retarded. That's why they have you cleaning portraits instead of training for worthwhile endeavors."

"It's a Slytherin Elf," Hermione whispered to Severus. "I didn't know they came in that flavor."

"You do not whisper in the presence of Lord Salazar," stated the elf.

"My apologies," said Hermione, "but I was struck by the design on your shield. The ancient and honorable houses have simple and bold insignia as befits their status, but despite your illustrious standing, your shield has a complicated pattern. Is that some mark of special favor, Sir Reginald?"

"Your mind is not entirely dim, my child," said the elf.

"I see the depiction of many treasures, Sir Reginald," said Severus, "in particular, this silver spoon near the middle."

"We came. We cooked. We swept the impertinent assholes before us," said Sir Reginald, waving his weapon.

"That must be the very cleaver that carried you through to victory," said Hermione.

"I would record your shield, if I may?" said Severus, pulling out a camera. "Its beauty and significance, along with yours, needs wider appreciation."

Sir Reginald struck a pose. Even Salazar's features appeared to soften.

After they had left the Restricted Section, Hermione turned to Severus. "What is it, sir?"

"The design on the shield is a map," he said. "It will lead us to the silver spoon."

Success.

Combing two prompts from MuseAmusant.

- Molly is hired by the Department of Mysteries

- Hermione befriends a portrait in a hidden corner of the Restricted Section