

Hallelujah, I Just Love Her So

by Minerva

Severus Snape receives a valuable book from a colleague and tries to return the gift.

Part I

Chapter 1 of 2

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Hallelujah, I Just Love Her So

AN: This plot-bunny literally bit me in my behind as I was cleaning like mad for Christmas.

Harry Potter and his world belong to JK Rowling.

For the sake of the plot Spinner's End had to be moved to Newcastle, the place where The Animals are from.

Finally home! While Hermione Granger enjoyed her teaching position at Hogwarts, she had been looking forward to the Christmas holidays away from hordes of children, from the draughty old castle, from gossiping colleagues. She had stayed on for a few days after most of the pupils had left on the train, finishing paperwork and preparing for the new term.

After graduating from the Wizarding University of Salem, she had put in a short stint at the Ministry of Magic before taking Headmistress McGonagall's offer of the Charms position that had become vacant after Filius Flitwick's retirement. Having just turned thirty, Ms Granger had held the post for seven years, and while she still liked teaching, she could understand the attitude of some of her colleagues better now. Maybe Snape's judgement of "Dunderheads, all of them" was a bit harsh, but "Dunderheads, most of the them, most of the time" would cover it well.

It had been a surprise for Hermione to see Severus Snape sitting at the High Table when she came back to Hogwarts. She had thought him dead as had nearly everyone else but had been honestly glad to see him alive and well.

The emotion was not completely unselfish because in her darker hours she still had blamed herself for not trying to help him after Nagini's attack. Later, Hermione learned that Narcissa Malfoy had put a monitoring spell on Snape. It was a benevolent spell usually used for children and undetectable if anyone checked himself for traces of Dark magic. It had been tied to a trusted house-elf well versed in healing. Said elf had Apparated into the Shack seconds after the trio had left and saved the Potions master's life.

Apparently, Snape had spent some years in New Zealand before he came back to Hogwarts. The Potions master would never be a happy-go-lucky person, but the time abroad had done him good health- and temper-wise. He led Slytherin house with a firm but kind-if-a-bit-gruff hand, and his N.E.W.T.-level students were considered prime catches for anyone looking for a Potions apprentice.

After some months, Hermione got over her ingrained awe of Snape, and he seemed to see her as a colleague rather than a hand-waving 11-year-old. From then on they had infrequent but passionate debates over a range of topics from new developments in their respective fields to Muggle literature and the Charms mistress had come to appreciate his dry and cutting humour. During the summer holidays she had come across an incredibly rare and old Potions text in a Sydney Muggle shop of all places and she had bought it for a mere pittance with Severus in mind. At Christmas she wrapped it up and delivered it just before she left for the holidays.

Now the young woman was searching for the perfect cleaning music as her flat had become a bit seedy due to her long absence. Dressed in old jeans, a Glastonbury t-shirt and with a floral scarf to tie back her hair, she turned the volume up and got started.

Severus Snape was completely flabbergasted. Hermione Granger had just dropped a Christmas present on his desk. He had wanted to know what it was to thank her properly at the staff dinner in the evening and opened it immediately. A first edition of *Salves and Unguents of Middle and Eastern Europe* with annotations by Erasmus Katcherovsky, the foremost Potions master of the 17th century! If he sold the book he would make enough money to buy a new roof and possibly a glass conservatory as well for his house at Spinner's End in Newcastle.

Snape was torn. If Granger knew nothing of the book's worth, he would be cheating her out of something valuable he remembered vividly enough how small a young teacher's salary was and if she knew of the tome's worth, she might want something from him in return. He knew he would not rest until he had found out what.

Wrapping up the book, he made his way up to her chambers only to be informed by a house-elf that she had already left for the holidays. Sighing, he trudged back to his own quarters.

There he poured himself a dram of single-malt whiskey and sat down to think the whole affair over.

Granger did not strike him as a particularly cunning person. If she had a question or an issue with him (usually concerning point-deductions), she said so directly. Also, she had shown herself to be particularly inept at the strategic games so dear to boarding school teachers; therefore, she nearly always got stuck with the most unpleasant duties such as chaperoning the Hogsmeade weekends together with him.

Colleagues had tried to get Snape to brew obscure potions before by giving him presents, but Granger had never struck him as a vain person. Her skin didn't need any enhancements, and her hair had settled down to exuberant curls rather than a bushy mop. If she had urgent need of his skills as a Potions master, she would simply say so and appeal to his better nature.

And save Madam Pince and Severus himself, Hermione Granger was the most knowledgeable person in Hogwarts about books. It seemed highly unlikely that she didn't know how much her gift was worth. Was it possible that she valued him highly enough to give him such a gem? If so, then why? They got along nicely, but never in their acquaintance as fellow teachers had he had the impression that he was of special interest to her. There was no helping it; he would have to seek her out and ask.

Searching his cabinet, he looked for a suitable present for Granger. Some years ago on an ingredients gathering excursion to the Outer Hebrides, Severus had come across a woman selling intricately knitted scarves made of very finely spun wool. He had bought a brass coloured one on impulse, with half a mind to give it to Poppy Pomfrey on her birthday. When the mediwitch had come to dinner one day in a yellow cardigan that made her skin look like re-ingested pumpkin-soup, he discarded the idea. Now the scarf might come in handy. And it would look very well with Granger's skin-tone; it might even enhance the golden highlights in her hair. Huh? Golden highlights? Severus shook his head in an attempt to clear his mind.

After he had transfigured his second finest parchment into wrapping paper and wrapped the present, he took his travelling cloak and *Salves and Unguents*, and then he made his way up to Headmistress McGonagall's office.

There were charms for house-cleaning, but once in a while Hermione felt the need for doing things the Muggle way. Scrubbing a bathtub to within an inch of its life was very satisfying indeed. Nearly as nice as the completely gobsmacked expression on Severus Snape's face when she had wished him "Happy Christmas" and had given him his present. Why would he look so surprised? Hermione knew for a fact that he got presents a bottle of scotch from Minerva, a personal blend of herbal tea from Pomona, concert tickets from Filius, and luxurious parchment and quills from the Malfoys. And the annual card from Harry Potter. Nevertheless, a present from Hermione seemed to take him by surprise. Well, it was bound to be a nice surprise. It was a fabulous book, and she knew that he didn't have it.

Finished with the bathroom, Hermione turned down the volume of "The Animals On Tour." Cleaning her kitchen window, she sang along to their rendition of Ray Charles's "Hallelujah, I just love her so." Thus, she only heard her doorbell when it rang for the third time.

Severus Snape was not sure he had found the right flat. The door only had a number, not a name, and loud music was coming from the inside. He had to suppress a grin. Hailing from Newcastle, he was intimately acquainted with this particular band. He owned all their records, although they were stored at his home as the record player wouldn't work at Hogwarts. If this was indeed Granger singing along with Eric Burdon, Severus was prepared to see his colleague in a new light. Her voice was nothing special, but very pleasing in its intensity. Lucky would be the man she thought of right now ...

Part II

Chapter 2 of 2

Severus Snape receives a valuable book from a colleague and tries to return the gift.

Author's Note: My gentle readers might notice a trend with my last two stories. They do portray Hermione in situations where she's not quite near Mrs Stewart's standards in her housekeeping. In no way do I intend to besmirch one of our favourite heroines. The underlying theme here is rather my own ineptitude with household chores. Presented with the choice of Christmas cleaning vs finishing a story, my priorities are quite clear.

He rang the doorbell a third time.

Hermione Granger opened the door in jeans and a T-shirt, hair tied back with a shawl. "Severus! What a nice surprise! Do come in."

Reflexively, Severus sneered – 'nice surprise', pah – but swallowed an uncharitable answer, remembering the reason for this visit.

She turned around, leaving the door open, and thus gave him no chance to state and conclude his business on the door-step.

The flat was in a state of disarray. It seemed his colleague was in the process of doing some serious Christmas-cleaning and doing it the Muggle way, no less. Granger had turned down the volume on her record player, and now her voice came from a room on the left, the kitchen presumably. "I was about to have a cup of tea. Is Earl Grey all right with you?"

He resigned himself to having tea before handing back the book. "Yes, thank you."

"Make yourself comfortable. I'll be right back."

Books were stacked on the chairs, and the spread of the settee was covered in cat-hair. Severus remained standing and walked over to Granger's stereo system. The pieces were old but of good quality, and her record collection was impressive. Leafing through it, he found many of his own favourites – Them, The Animals, Rory Gallagher.

He didn't hear her until she addressed him. "My father is a bit of a high-end nerd and justified buying a state-of-the-art B&O sound system with my need of having my own. Not that I complained."

Not waiting for an answer, she had turned back to the settee and was now staring at the spread covering it. She seemed to have reached a decision and pulled it off with a flourish. "Sorry. I realise you couldn't sit down here with black trousers. I kept it – complete with Kneazle hair – as a memory of Crookshanks."

Severus vaguely remembered that her familiar had passed away at the end of the Summer term. He sat down on one end of the couch and said, "Rosmerta mentioned last week that her cat has kittens she suspects are part Kneazle. I am sure she would part with one if you are ready."

Granger looked at him with suspiciously shiny eyes. Snape hoped to be spared tears and tried to change the topic. "As to the reason for my visit—"

"Milk?"

"Yes, please. Miss Granger, I appreciate your gift, but I must return it. This treatise is far too expensive a present for a mere colleague."

"I know it is quite rare. I've read it cursorily, and most parts go over my head. I gave it to you because I believe it belongs in the hands of a Potions master. I am enough of a bibliophile to wish a book to be with someone who appreciates it thoroughly."

"Be that as it may, if you sell the book, you'll make more than a month's salary."

She cradled her tea cup and had faraway look. After a while she made up her mind. "Do you know about my parents?"

"Minerva only said that they were in Australia when the war came to a head."

"They still are. In the summer before Voldemort fell, I changed their memories, erased all knowledge they had of me and planted a false wish emigrate to Australia. It was the only way I could think of to make them leave the country and be safe."

That was impressive, even for Granger's standards.

"How long did their memories stay modified?"

"Nearly eleven months."

He winced.

"Exactly. I managed to return their memories, but their emotions were affected. And of course, they were offended by my highhandedness in making a decision without consulting them."

"They were prime targets. Voldemort even let us search for them in France and the US when he couldn't locate them in Britain."

"I know. I've read the transcript of Draco's trial. Still, I might have tried to persuade them, not force them. They couldn't have held me back as I was of age in both worlds. I should have made more of an effort to make them understand the danger without resorting to magic."

"You had to make a difficult decision; you were very young then, and time was of the essence. In hindsight there might have been a better solution than the one you found, but then..." He trailed off. Granger was no gossip, and she deserved honesty. "I know a lot about wrong decisions and regret. Try to put it behind you and make do with what you have."

"Thank you. I appreciate your honesty. Most of the time, I do realise that my parents and I have come out of the war relatively unscathed. And other Muggleborns tell me that relationships between them and their parents rarely ever stay close when they decide to live fully in the Wizarding World. Which brings me back to the book. Do you intend to sell it?"

"Of course not."

"Then please keep it. On my bookshelf, it would be a constant reminder of past mistakes; on yours, it will do something good. I was walking through a rainy Sydney after a particularly bitter fight with my parents. I was feeling nearly as low as at that time when I was carrying the Horcrux. The bookshop I hadn't noticed before was like a sanctuary, and when I found the tome and realised how crucial it could be for your research, that somehow was a turning point for me. My parents were alive and well, and even if I hurt, I had found the book. I am not making a lot of sense, am I?"

Severus pondered on the wisdom of answering truthfully. He did understand her. And he wanted that particular book. "All right, I will accept your gift. Thank you."

"I am glad. It would have been a shame if you didn't, even more so as it was a Muggle shop, and I paid merely fifteen Australian dollars for it."

"Will you at least let me help you? I could dust your records for you; that is something I always do by hand as house elves are not suited to do it properly."

She was smiling now.

"Feel free to dust and browse to your heart's content."

The afternoon progressed satisfactorily for both of them. Hermione saw her flat becoming tidy, and Severus happily perused one of the most interesting record collections he had ever come across. As the evening drew nearer, the Charms instructor phoned for take-away curry and hopped into the shower, leaving her colleague to decant the wine and select the music for dinner.

Over their food, they discussed music, with Severus revealing one of his happiest childhood memories: sitting on his father's shoulders during an early performance of the later Animals outside a neighbourhood pub.

The summer saw Hermione at Spinner's End, listening to Severus' records. By the time the next term came around, they had managed to combine the mechanics of an old gramophone with one of their record players, and the Charms mistress had invented – and patented – a charm to make Muggle listening devices work in magically charged environments.

Two years later, in the middle of June, the select guests at the reception were a tad surprised by the music the new Mr and Mrs Snape had chosen for their first dance as a married couple: Ray Charles' rendition of "Hallelujah, I just love her so".

The End