

# Contract Renewal

*by debjunk*

Lucius needs the list of faculty contract extensions for the Board of Governors, which is something that should have taken a matter of minutes for the Headmaster to complete. Severus, however, has put off submitting the form, and the Board is getting impatient. Lucius seeks out Severus to find out why he hasn't sent in the paperwork.

## Oneshot

*Chapter 1 of 1*

Lucius needs the list of faculty contract extensions for the Board of Governors, which is something that should have taken a matter of minutes for the Headmaster to complete. Severus, however, has put off submitting the form, and the Board is getting impatient. Lucius seeks out Severus to find out why he hasn't sent in the paperwork.

There was a rather insistent knock at the door. Severus looked up from the paperwork he was reviewing and barked out, "Enter."

Lucius Malfoy strolled through the door and into the room, ostentatious as ever. Severus frowned. "To what do I owe the displeasure of your company?"

"Now Severus, is that the way to talk to your best friend?" Lucius asked. He harshly continued. "I have been waiting for your owl about the teachers' contracts all week. I finally figured I'd have to hunt you down for the paperwork. You know the Board of Governors gets impatient with these formalities."

Severus rolled his eyes, but rose from his seat. He rounded his desk and stood face to face with Malfoy. "You enjoy all the lip-flapping that goes on with them, Lucius, don't deny it. You probably jumped at the chance to come check on me so you could report whatever juicy gossip the board believes is going on here."

"You know me too well, Severus." Lucius sternly looked at Severus, who glared back. They held each other's gaze intently until Lucius could take no more. He broke into laughter. Severus relaxed his gaze also and smiled.

"It's good to see you, old friend, despite the reason for your visit," Severus said. He motioned to the seat in front of his desk, and moved to take back his own. He lifted the paperwork he'd been reviewing when Lucius had knocked. "I've been going over everything just now in anticipation of your coming."

Lucius nodded. "What's the holdup, Severus? The reinstatement of contracts is simply a formality. I expected to see that paperwork at least a week ago on my desk."

Severus frowned and placed the paper back on his desk. He glared down at it before looking back at his friend.

"Severus, what is it?" Lucius asked with concern.

"It's nothing, Lucius, but stupidity on my part."

"Are you having issues with some of the staff?"

"No, they are all their stellar selves. Even Longbottom doesn't run the other way anymore when we meet in the hall. Besides, I can't remember the last time someone was sacked for academic reasons," Severus admitted.

"Then what is it?" Lucius asked as he arched his eyebrow.

Severus rose and began to pace. "You will think me an old fool...."

"You forget I'm an older fool than you, Severus."

Severus stopped pacing and looked seriously at Lucius. "It's Hermione Granger."

"What's the mudblood up to now?" Lucius asked with a sigh.

Severus slammed his fist on the desk. "Do *not* call her that!" he said sharply. "You would think that after the war you would have gotten some sense in that entitled head of yours!"

Lucius had the good sense to look ashamed for a millisecond. He lifted his hands in mock surrender. "You're right, of course. Sometimes I speak before I think."

Somewhat mollified, Severus continued. "You must not breathe a word of what I am about to tell you to anyone, is that understood?"

Lucius nodded, his eyebrow arching again in interest.

"We have spent some time together over the past year or so, as you might imagine would happen with a headmaster and his staff members. I find she is bright, funny, and a friend."

"You're in love with her," Lucius stated boldly.

Severus opened his mouth to contest his friend's statement, but closed it again rapidly. "Yes," he sighed. "I find that I am."

"So, what's the problem?" Lucius asked.

Severus rose and began to pace again. "Look at me! I'm twice her age. She has no interest in me; I'm just her boss. She's nice to me because she has to be."

Lucius gave Severus a bored look. "Despite all her flaws, Severus, I've never known Granger to be false."

Severus turned to Lucius and stilled. "She doesn't care for me in that way. My dilemma is this: do I do the right thing and renew her contract, or do I do the selfish thing and fire her so I don't have to deal with this any longer."

Lucius rested his chin on his fist and tapped his lips with his finger, mulling over the issue. "You're afraid she'll find someone, and you'll have to watch, like with Lily."

Severus nodded quickly. "It's only a matter of time. She's single now, but she won't be for long. Our illustrious Muggle Studies teacher, Donovan, has his eye on her, and there are a myriad of young single men in Hogsmeade who I'm sure would love to get their hands on her."

"What ever happened to the Weasley boy?" Lucius asked.

"She saw what a cretin he was and broke it off. Well, she says they just didn't work well together, but she's too kind to say the truth. He's involved with someone in the Ministry now."

"Well, I need that form filled out, Severus. What are you going to do?"

Picking up the form, Severus looked it over. "The deadline is Wednesday next. Can you give me until then? I will send it by owl no later than that date."

Lucius rose and nodded. He moved forward and placed his hand on Severus' arm. "My friend, do not underestimate Granger or yourself. I know you will choose the right thing." Turning, he made his way to the door. He rested his hand on the knob and turned back to the headmaster. "Perhaps you're wrong about her feelings for you. Could it be so inconceivable that she could care for you?" He let his words ring in the air before continuing. "Good luck, Severus."

Severus nodded absently as Lucius left. Hermione and he were friends, he knew that much. He just couldn't see her feeling anything more for him, and that was the problem. Neither could he see himself being able to bear it when she found another. Even having to work with her, never being able to express his true feelings had become burdensome. He sighed. His first instinct was to rid himself of the problem, but he had never run from his fears before. He wasn't sure he wanted to start now.

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Severus quietly peeked around the corner. He'd heard Hermione's voice and wanted to covertly see what she was doing. She was talking with Donovan, smiling at him as he spoke. A jolt of jealousy shot through Severus. He wanted her to smile at him alone like that. Donovan seemed to be enjoying his tête-à-tête with her. The pair continued chatting, and Severus continued seething. He couldn't do it; he knew that now. Watching Hermione with other men... men who could possibly be future love interests... it was just too much. He couldn't have her working at Hogwarts any longer. He couldn't renew her contract. It would be the death of him.

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Dinner was a subdued affair. Hermione took her usual place next to Severus and greeted him with a smile. He simply nodded and concentrated on his plate. She tried to start up conversations, but he wanted no part of it. He scowled as he nibbled at his mushy peas, finding he had no appetite whatsoever.

"Severus, do you have any plans for this weekend?" Hermione asked.

He looked at her blankly. "Pardon?"

"This weekend, are you doing anything?"

"Oh, no... no, I have no plans." Severus went back to staring at his peas.

"I was wondering if you'd like to go to Hogsmeade with me. I need to pick up some books." She leaned in conspiratorially. "We can even get some of that fudge from Honeydukes that you love so much."

"Sorry, I can't," Severus said shortly. "If you'll excuse me." He rose, placing his napkin over his mostly full plate and left in a billow of robes, leaving Hermione Granger staring after him with concern.

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The next two days found Severus hiding from everyone. He didn't even go to meals. He'd spent most of those days staring out his window, but now he was looking at Hermione's employment contract. He'd made up his mind. She was not to stay at Hogwarts, but how to deliver that message. He needed to send her a letter of separation, and delivering it by owl was the normal way to send such documentation, however, he was contemplating delivering it directly to her. They considered each other friends, it would be cold hearted of him to simply send an owl with her dismissal. His thoughts were interrupted by a knock on the door. He put the contract and letter of separation away in his drawer and rose to open the door. He found Hermione looking a bit nervous on the other side.

"May I come in?" she asked apprehensively. Severus stood aside so she could pass by him. She turned to face him, and with a look of determination, extended an envelope out to him after he'd closed the door.

"What's this?" he asked as he grasped the envelope.

"My resignation."

"I beg your pardon?" Severus stated, taken aback.

"I feel it's time to move on, Severus. I need a new direction in my life."

Severus stared at his Arithmancy professor. She was lying, he could tell. Opening the envelope he quickly read the succinct resignation and put the letter down.

"This tells me nothing," he countered. "Why are you resigning?"

"I told you, I want other opportunities."

Severus regarded her intently. Something was amiss. Even without using Legilimency, he knew she wasn't being forthcoming as to her true reasons for resigning. He also had to ask himself why he wasn't simply accepting her resignation; it would make things so much easier. But as he studied her, watched her stand awkwardly before him and fidget, he realized he wanted nothing to do with easier. He might have been able to convince himself before that firing her was what he wanted, but it was the exact opposite of what he wanted. He wanted her to be as close to him as humanly possible. He didn't care if she never felt the same about him as he felt about her. He just wanted her to be there, as a friend, as a... whatever. And somehow, as he looked at her, he thought she may just want that too.

He stepped toward her. "Hermione, you're lying. I've been a spy for years. Don't you think I can recognize when I hear a lie? What are you hiding? You're a wonderful teacher, you love the students, and you have made numerous friends among the faculty. Why are you resigning?"

She moved toward the door. "I just can't work here anymore."

He grabbed her by the arm and held her back. "Tell me why," he demanded.

She hung her head and refused to turn to look at him. "It's nothing I wish to discuss," she whispered.

He slowly turned her around until she was facing him. She tried to look away, but he moved to where she could see him. "As your employer, I want to know; as your friend, I need to know." He held her gaze, willing her to tell him what it was that was making her run. He watched as a tear snuck down her cheek and restrained his wayward hand from wiping it dry.

"It... it's you. I care about you, Severus... more than I should." She looked to the ground then. "I know I shouldn't, but I can't help myself. I just want to leave with dignity and move on because I know you aren't interested in me in that way."

He gazed at her in wonder. "You have feelings for me?" he whispered.

Hermione nodded. "Can we please just forget all of this? You can accept my resignation, and we can just go along as if nothing happened."

"But I don't want to do that, Hermione. You see, I've been holed up in here for two days because I feel the same way about you. I was going to end your contract with Hogwarts."

Hermione looked shocked. Severus couldn't tell if it was because he'd admitted to having feelings for her, or if it was the fact that he was going to sack her. "I thought it was the only solution," he continued. "However, when you came in here with your resignation I knew that wasn't the answer."

"You were going to sack me because you care about me?" Hermione demanded.

"Yes, just like you were going to quit because you care about me," Severus countered.

"I can't believe you would do..."

Hermione's complaint was silenced by his lips crashing into hers. Severus marveled that he was finally kissing the woman he'd been wanting for so long now. Her hand snaked up, and her fingers entwined in his hair. He pulled her closer, trying to take all of her in as his mouth explored hers. All too soon they were pulling away from each other, breathing heavily.

"If you kiss me again like that," Hermione said, "I'll forgive you for trying to sack me."

A devilish smirk came across Severus' face. "If we kiss like that again, you will be consigned to working here forever because I will never let you go."

Hermione grinned back. "Where do I sign?"

Severus leaned in and kissed her again passionately. Breaking the kiss, his lips moved to her ear, and he whispered, "Sealed with a kiss."

Hermione giggled before his lips captured her again, and neither spoke for a very long time after that.

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Lucius opened the owl eagerly, anxious to know what Severus had decided. As he unrolled the scroll, a small piece of parchment floated out and onto his desk. He lifted it first and read the three words on it.

*You were right.*

He smiled to himself as he looked to the contract renewal form. All the teachers at Hogwarts would have their contracts renewed this year, even Granger.

His grin grew wider. "Congratulations, my friend," he said aloud.

## **The End**

*A/N: This was written for the sshg promptfest. Here's the prompt: At a crossroads, Headmaster Snape must decide whether or not to let Professor Granger continue her contract as Arithmancy Professor at Hogwarts. She is the perfect employee. However, his feelings for her are not quite professional and more than likely unrequited. Does he really want to spend the rest of his life watching her work for him, perhaps marrying or loving another?*

*Many thanks to my beta steelersgirl for the look-over. Thank you, too, dear reader, for taking the time to read.*