

Vulnerable

by stgulik

Even an old spy can be caught off-guard.

A drabble in five parts

Chapter 1 of 1

Even an old spy can be caught off-guard.

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Severus Snape stood waiting for an Order member behind a tawdry music hall. In his youth, this borough had been rife with prostitutes and brothels. Snape wondered if things could be said to have improved.

He heard a strange noise and whirled, wand in hand, but the alley was empty. Then—

“Professor?”

He could not place the voice, but the face of the student who stepped out of a darkened doorway was infinitely familiar to him.

“Miss Granger?”

“Oh, Professor, I’m so glad to see you.” Relief colored her voice and she began to make her unsteady way toward him.

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He could not fathom her presence. “Miss Granger, what are you doing in SoHo?”

“I—I was with ... Harry Potter, sir,” she replied, “and I must have gotten separated from our group. I’ve been so lost! I—”

“You shouldn’t be anywhere near this place, friends or no,” he said. She had reached his side and her small hands took his sleeve, his arm, and desperately clutched at him.

“Now that I found you, sir, you can help me find my way back.” She smiled up at him trustingly before turning to lead him the way she had come.

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“Wait one moment,” he managed. “In your third year, I set an essay in Defense. What was the topic?”

“Oh.” Her face clouded, then she shrugged negligently. “I forget. Honestly, Professor, who could remember one essay?”

Snape brought up his wand. She twisted away and drew with surprising speed, but he fired a hex that lifted her off her feet and slammed her against the wall. She crumpled in a heap, unconscious, and her face seemed to melt while it shed its glamour, resolving into harsh, unfamiliar lines.

He stood over the inert form. "Hermione Granger could," he replied coldly.

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It was the wife or sister of some newcomer whom he had met once in passing; Lord Voldemort had taken to recruiting whole families lately. Snape checked her arm for the ink, and he sneered when he found it: fresh, malignant, raw.

To kill her would be to invite inquiry, so he perfunctorily Obliviated her with her own wand before rolling her into a pile of rubbish.

It was not the first time a Death Eater had seen fit to test the reflexes of Severus Snape, nor his first encounter with the dark glamour used and abused by their lot.

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No, there was only one problem tonight: this stranger lying unconscious before him had been coached to impersonate the student Hermione Granger, friend of Harry Potter, brightest witch of her age.

Soberly, Snape replayed the series of emotions that the sight of her, alone, defenseless and far from her protective circle, had elicited in him. He forced himself to admit he had fatally let his guard down the instant he saw her face.

It seemed one of his rivals believed they could get to him through his feelings for this particular girl.

In that moment, he knew they were right.

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Written for GrangerSnape100's "Strange Noise" challenge. Reviews welcome ...