

Meet the Boys

by *Subversa*

Severus and Hermione must break the news of their engagement to Harry and Ron -- how will the boys take it? This story is part of the Master of Enchantment series, following Bast: Operation Kitty and Meet the Parents.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Humble thanks to Potion Mistress, who agreed to beta this story for me.

These characters, and the entire Universe in this story, are the property of the Incomparable J.K. Rowling, long may she wave.

Meet the Boys

Harry took another swallow from his pint and craned his neck to look out the window of the Three Broomsticks.

"Where is she?" he muttered, half to himself.

Ron sipped his firewhisky and watched Madam Rosmerta cross the room. "You know witches, mate. Add twenty minutes minimum to any time they give you." He tore his eyes away from the comely pub owner and grinned at his closest friend.

"Hermione's not like that, though," Harry objected, running a hand through his untidy shock of black hair. "She's never acted like a *girly* girl."

Ron shrugged. "Ask me, it's time she *started* to act like a girly girl. How is she ever going to get a man bossing everyone around the way she does?" He took another drink of his firewhisky, with a reminiscent look in his eyes. "She can be downright scary. You don't ever want to try to make out with her; she'll be telling you how to do it."

Harry pressed his lips together for a moment, striving to retain control of his urge to laugh. "I guess that *would* be kind of scary," he said neutrally. He would never forget the tortuous months when Ron and Hermione had tried to be a couple, back in the summer after sixth year, which carried on into the beginning weeks of their first seventh year term. Their usual constant bickering had escalated into something resembling a military action, where the only modes of operation were blitz attack and cold war. Harry and the other seventh year Gryffindors had taken cover and prayed for the hostilities to end. The whole affair had put Harry off girls and romance for some time.

He decided to change the subject. "Ginny says the wedding plans are coming right along," he commented.

"Does she?" Ron asked with mild interest. "I guess it's a good thing that Mum is there to help with the planning, since Luna's mum has passed on."

"Ginny says that since your mum was on such a tight budget planning our wedding, that she really has more *erm*scope for her ideas this time around."

Ron frowned into his glass of firewhisky, paying scant attention to the conversation. "Nah, we're having a small wedding; just family and close friends."

Harry glanced worriedly at his best friend. "Is that what Luna tells you?" he asked carefully.

Ron shrugged. "It's what we agreed on in the beginning. She talks about it, mate, but I don't pay it much mind. Nod, agree every now and then, read the Quidditch scores in the *Daily Prophet*..."

Harry considered leaving it alone, as retreat can often be considered the better part of valour. But Ron was his best friend, and it was his duty to not allow him to be blindsided. "You might want to start paying attention to what Luna tells you about the wedding, mate."

Ron looked up at him. "Why?"

"You remember that Professor Lockhart got well enough to leave St. Mungo's, right?"

Ron was looking bewildered. "What's that got to do with my wedding?"

"Well, he's taken to writing books about interior decorating and party planning," Harry explained patiently.

Ron was still giving him a "what are you on about" kind of look.

"...and your mum has hired him as your wedding consultant."

There was a loud crash as Ron's chair hit the floor, and his glass of firewhisky shattered at his feet.

"She WOULDN'T!" he shouted.

In a flash, Madam Rosmerta was upon them with a broom and a dustpan in her hands and a martial light in her eyes.

"You know that you boys will always be welcome in my pub," she said, beginning to sweep up the shattered glass. "I'm sure we couldn't be more grateful for all you did to rid us of You-Know-Who," she added, finishing her sweep-up with a final ruthless swipe. "But that does *not* give you the right to come in here, shouting and breaking things." She glared at them in her most effective Keep-the-Hogwarts-Students-in-Line way. "Now, sit down and behave, or I'll be telling your wife, Harry Potter, and your mum and your girlfriend, Ronald Weasley, exactly how you carried on!"

She whirled and marched away from them, leaving them both with their mouths agape.

"...but I didn't *do* anything!" Harry protested indignantly, stung by the threat to tell his wife.

Ron righted his chair and sat down, shaking his head. "They are all barking mad, mate. Every single last one of them. We love them, and we've got to have them, but they are *all* mental."

Harry nodded in agreement before taking a deep breath and returning to the subject at hand. "Brace yourself, Ron, and pay attention. I'm going to tell you about the flocks of pink doves, the cherubs raining twinkling pink confetti upon your guests and by the way, the number of names on your guest list is approaching the population of Hogsmeade itself. There will also be colour-coordinated programmes engraved with your names that sing a song especially composed for the occasion by Lockhart himself and which throw in a quick advert for his latest book after the last verse...."

Hermione shoved her hands into the pockets of her jacket and hurried down the path to the castle gates and the road into Hogsmeade. Severus accompanied her, his long legs moving easily over the ground, and frowned at her agitation.

"So much fuss for the Boy Who Lived and Lived and Lived," he grumbled.

"You *don't* have to come with me, Severus. I told you that." Hermione quickened her pace, glancing again at her wristwatch.

"And deny Potter and Weasley the chance to denigrate me to my face? That wouldn't be sporting of me, Pet."

She hunched a shoulder at him, keeping her face averted as she walked. "You're acting like a right prat and have been these last thirty minutes."

Severus grasped her arm gently and pulled her to a stop. She glowered at the ground and shifted away from him. He leaned in close to her ear. "My Pet, thirty minutes ago you were naked in my arms and begging me not to stop." He took her chin in his hand and tilted her face up. "Smile for me. I will endeavour to behave like an adult, which is more than you can say for Potter or Weasley."

Hermione gave him half a smile. "Sometimes you can be completely impossible, you know," she said, turning and continuing on her way.

"But it gives you a finer appreciation of me when I am only utterly objectionable," he reminded her. Severus was bantering with her, but he was also observing her unobtrusively, trying to ascertain her mood. Ever since they had scrambled out of bed and begun to throw their clothes on, she had been distant and distracted.

He continued on with her quietly for a space, watching the emotions flitting across her expressive face. He cursed himself for a fool, remembering his resolve, earlier in the day, to let her make this trek alone. As the day had worn on, he had found himself less and less willing to allow her out of his presence for an indefinite period of time. Resolutely, he decided to step out of this situation with as much of his dignity as he could salvage.

Just shy of the Three Broomsticks, Severus stopped and gently touched her shoulder. Hermione also stopped and turned to him rather impatiently. "What *is* it, Severus? I am already so late!"

Severus reached around and placed the large palm of his hand on the nape of her neck, holding her head as he bent to press a sweet, lingering kiss on her lips, concentrating all of his considerable focus on the task at hand. When he felt that he had her complete, undivided attention, he ended the kiss and pressed his forehead to hers. "I'm going along to the Hog's Head for a pint, Pet. You can come find me there when you're finished here." He gave her neck a gentle squeeze and then walked away from her without a backward glance.

Hermione stood for a moment, feeling that ineffable sense of loss that assailed her whenever she and Severus parted and the Enchantment ceased to thrum through her blood. Her eyes tracked his progress as he walked away from her to turn down the side street upon which the Hog's Head Inn was located. His long legs carried him quickly; she hungrily absorbed his form in the snug black denims and lightweight green cotton shirt he wore until he moved out of her line of sight.

"Get a *grip*," she muttered to herself, tearing her gaze away from the place where she had last seen him. She gave herself a little shake and marched into the Three Broomsticks in a very businesslike way.

Severus meandered down to the Hog's Head Inn and pushed his way inside. Aberforth Dumbledore, the barkeep, eyed him askance when he spied the Muggle clothing. Severus snorted at this reaction and pulled coins from his pocket. "Pull a pint and hold your tongue," he grumbled at the older wizard.

He turned his back to the bar and looked around at the occupied tables. Deep in conversation in a dim corner, he spied Lupin and Tonks, their heads together and their hands clasped on the tabletop. Ignoring their obvious desire for privacy, he took his beer from Aberforth and walked over to their table, setting his glass down and sliding into a chair.

"Good evening," he said glumly.

Lupin surveyed Severus' dejected face with some amusement; Tonks looked more exasperated.

"Have a seat, Severus," she said, somewhat acerbically.

Lupin shot her a silencing glance and said pleasantly, "Hullo, Severus. Out for an evening stroll?"

Severus sipped his beer disconsolately. "Hermione's at the Three Broomsticks "

" with Harry and Ron, we know. We saw them in there waiting for her," Tonks supplied. "That's why we're *here*. To avoid company."

Severus nodded, gazing off into space. "I don't blame you a bit."

Tonks rolled her eyes, but her ready sense of humour was tickled by Severus' self-absorbed oblivion. She looked over at Lupin, biting her lip to keep from snickering; Lupin lifted her hand and kissed her fingertips. She lovingly stroked a finger over the scar marring his lower lip, completely diverted from the Slytherin drama queen across the table. Lupin nodded toward the back of the pub, where the bathrooms of questionable cleanliness were located. With a resigned sigh, Tonks excused herself and walked away from the table.

Severus watched her go, then looked over at Lupin, noting the lines of fatigue in his face. "Wearing you down, is she?" he inquired snidely.

Lupin pursed his lips and nodded. "You have *no* idea," he said with feeling.

Severus raised his eyebrows. "Don't I?" he asked in some amusement.

The two Hogwarts professors, both still in Muggle dress after their weekend holiday with Tonks and Hermione, looked somewhat out-of-place in this all-wizard community. They proceeded to set themselves further apart when they startled the other patrons of the pub by erupting in a crack of laughter that went on for an oddly long time. Tonks, who was quietly conversing with Aberforth at the bar, smiled indulgently when she heard the sound, knowing that the two men were undoubtedly talking about their newly found and much younger girlfriends.

Severus recovered from the unaccustomed activity of laughing before Lupin had stopped his own chuckled aftershocks of mirth. Slanting a sneer at his one-time schoolboy enemy, and current best man of his wedding, Severus drawled, "And you thought it would be hard to keep up with them *dancing*..."

Harry leaned closer to Hermione, a look of stark concern on his face. "Hermione, have you had Dumbledore check you over for possible Dark spells? Or did Snape give you something unusual to drink just before you started to feel this way?" He pulled his wand from his belt, his green eyes fastened on the face of the girl he loved second only to Ginny. "I can do the check now; it's simple enough, and something we learned in Auror training."

Hermione responded to him with rank amazement. "How *dare* you say something like that to me, Harry Potter!" she hissed. "Do you think, after all the time we spent training how to fight Voldemort and the Death Eaters, that I would be unable to detect some kind of *spell* put on me to make me fall in love? Or that I would be stupid enough to drink an unknown substance?" She felt her indignation spiralling out of control and remembered her intention to remain calm and unmoved in the face of the objections she knew she must expect from Harry and Ron. After all, both of them had suffered under the scorn and disdain of Severus Snape for the last ten years of their lives; she could not expect them to change their perception of Severus in the blink of an eye, simply because she wanted it.

Harry sat back in his seat and put his wand away, looking slightly apologetic. "I didn't mean to insult you, Hermione. It's just ... Snape, of all people!"

Hermione looked over at Ron, wondering when he was going to pipe up with his undoubtedly infuriating reaction. He had been worrying her ever since she entered the Three Broomsticks; he had barely responded to her greeting, perfunctorily kissing her cheek when she hugged him. He had been sitting without speaking ever since; he hardly seemed to be focussing on what she was saying, and the look on his face was part horror and part indignation. She had expected him to be upset, but she had not expected him to be speechless.

"Harry, have you ever heard of the Enchantment?" she began, ready to tell the story that explained so much about her relationship with Severus.

Harry frowned. "Ginny told me about it once; it's a legend about a magical true love, right?"

"First of all, it's not a legend, but a scientifically verified phenomenon," Hermione lectured in her best teaching voice. "Muggles call it 'love at first sight,' but it's more like love at first touch. It *is* rare, but it does exist, and Severus and I have been blessed with it." She saw comprehension growing in Harry's eyes as he listened to her. "The first time we touched was the night the Death Eaters went for my parents; Severus took me by the arm, just to steady me, and it was like being hit by the steam engine of the Hogwarts Express." A smile lit her face, and Harry had to smile a little bit too in response to her happiness. "So, we're going to be married, and the wedding is Friday night and I want both of you to be there. Will you come?" She looked from Harry to Ron, who still looked severely disturbed.

Harry gave Hermione his trademark grin. "Of course I'll come to your wedding, Hermione." He jabbed Ron in the side with his elbow. "Ron will be there too, won't you, mate?"

Ron started and glanced shamefaced from Harry to Hermione. "Yeah, I'll be there," he allowed, hoping it was not something too awful he had just agreed to do.

Hermione beamed at them. "Oh, I'm glad that's all sorted out," she exclaimed. Then her expression sobered, and she placed her hand on Harry's arm. "Harry, Remus told me something really sweet when he was explaining to me about the Enchantment. Your mum and dad, Lily and James, had the Enchantment. Remember how we wondered why she went from despising him to loving him?"

"But Sirius said it was because my dad got over himself a bit and calmed down," Harry objected, puzzling over this new information.

"I'm sure that was what got him close enough for the first touch to happen, anyway," Hermione said.

They sat quietly for a moment, as if in respect for Lily and James Potter and the Enchantment they had enjoyed for all too short a time.

Harry broke the silence. "Speaking of Remus, I could have sworn I saw him outside on the pavement, snogging Tonks, of all people right in front of the Three Broomsticks! Has the entire world gone mad?"

"So it would appear, Mr. Potter."

All three of the Dream Team flinched at the sound of the sinister voice above them and looked up at Snape with somewhat guilty surprise.

"How do you *do* that?" Hermione demanded in amusement, patting the seat of the empty chair between herself and Ron.

"If he told you that, he would have to kill you, Hermione. Severus has to keep his student-control tactics as a closely-held secret."

Now they all leaned to look around Severus and saw Lupin and Tonks behind him, their hands entwined. Harry stood quickly and reached out to shake hands with Lupin, then he turned and offered his hand to Severus.

"Congratulations, Professor Snape. I hear we should be wishing you happy."

There was a tense moment as if every eye in the Three Broomsticks was now trained on the unlikely prospect of Harry Potter essaying a handshake with the dread Potions master, whose Potter-loathing had been legend these past thirty years.

Severus stood stock still for a moment, his eyes glued to the hand of the man across from him. He had disdained Harry Potter upon sight for the unlucky resemblance he held to his father, James, the nemesis of Severus' school years. This young man, however, had stood like a warrior in the face of Lord Voldemort and had fought shoulder to shoulder at Severus' side. Furthermore, Hermione loved this Potter as a brother and a friend. With an imperceptible straightening of his spine, Severus took the proffered hand in a firm grasp, and black eyes met green as he said, "Thank you, Harry. I will do everything in my power to make her happy."

The collective sigh Hermione heard was surely her imagination, she thought, as additional chairs were dragged up, and Severus, Lupin, and Tonks joined them around the table. Madam Rosmerta was cheerfully summoned by Lupin, and before long, champagne was being poured into the landlady's best crystal goblets, and glasses were raised in a toast to Hermione's and Severus' health and happiness.

When Ron sat, lump-like, through the toast, Tonks finally leaned over to him and gave him a nudge, saying in a playful tone, "Wotcher, Ron! You with us, mate?"

Ron looked at her with unseeing eyes, his mien that of a broken man.

"Flocks of pink doves!" he said in tones of abject loathing. "Cupids with pink confetti!" Then he buried his face in his shaking hands while Harry, Tonks, and Lupin gave way to peals of laughter, and Hermione and Severus traded looks of confusion.

The sun was setting as the two couples wended their way back to Hogwarts, having parted company with Harry and Ron at the Apparition point. Tonks entertained them as they strolled to the castle with descriptions of the depredations Molly Weasley had made in the funds provided by Mr. Lovegood for Ron and Luna's wedding. When she described how Molly had been enthusiastically aided by Gilderoy Lockhart, the wedding consultant, Severus looked at Hermione in horror.

"Tell me we will have no vulgar displays at our wedding," he begged her quietly, as they passed through the gate guarded by statues of winged boars.

Hermione twinkled up at him mischievously. "Define vulgar," she suggested.

Lupin chuckled. "This is where we wish you a good night," he said, pulling Tonks into a one-armed embrace while he clapped Severus on the shoulder.

Severus smirked at him. "Get some rest, Lupin. The wedding is Friday night, and you are the best man. Loss of limb or exhaustion will *not* excuse you."

Tonks wrapped her arms about Lupin's waist and gazed up at him with a look of sheer craving. "I'll just tuck him up and be on my way," she promised.

Severus snapped his fingers as if suddenly remembering something. "I'll have a house-elf pop in with a vitamin potion," he promised helpfully.

Lupin's, "Thanks for thinking of me, Severus," earned him nothing but an evil chuckle from the Potions master.

Severus led Hermione off for a walk around the lake. He shortened his stride to accommodate hers and held her close to him with an arm about her shoulders, the long fingers of his hand caressing her arm through the fabric of her jacket.

"Thank you for being so kind to Harry," she said to him.

"I was simply responding to his very courteous overture," he answered.

"You were gracious. You called him by his first name. You went beyond civility, and it made me very happy. Thank you."

He halted their progress and framed her face in his hands, tilting it so that they were gazing into one another's eyes. "Have you noticed, my Pet, that it is my one goal to make you happy?"

She smiled tremulously. "Yes," she breathed.

He bent to catch her lips in a searing kiss, pulling her body to his ravenously, one hand tangled in the mane of her hair, the other at the small of her back, pressing her to him urgently. Her hands quickly untucked his shirt from his trousers, and she slid her hands up his flat belly, over the ridge of his ribcage to lay over his pectoral muscles, lightly massaging his skin, loving the feel of the sinew beneath her hands.

Severus ended the kiss tenderly, releasing his hold on her in gradual stages, until he had pulled her hands from beneath his shirt. He sat her upon a fallen log in the spill of the newly risen moon, beneath the arching, star-filled heavens.

With his usual grace, he knelt before her, as if in supplication, and she gazed at him in surprised inquiry until she saw the small velvet box in his hands, and her questions were stilled on her lips.

Knowing that the sight of the box had afforded him her unswerving attention, he smiled ironically to himself and opened the box so that she could see his one heirloom possession.

"While you were having tea with Minerva this morning, I paid a visit of ceremony to my Great Aunt Seraphina Snape," he told her. "She is my grandfather's only living sibling and the only one of my family for whom I feel the least affection." One corner of his lip quirked. "She is a veritable dragon; she never married, and she rules the Snape family with a will of iron."

Hermione listened to him raptly, watching his face as he related the story to her. "She had a falling out with my father before I was born, regarding his treatment of my mother. I saw Aunt Seraphina only on holidays, and then, when I went to Hogwarts, I did not see her again until after my parents' deaths because I spent my holidays at school.

"This ring has been in my family for generations. Great Aunt Seraphina refused to let my father have it when my parents married because she did not trust him not to sell it. I never knew of its existence until today. She has given this ring to us, Hermione, and it would make me very proud if you would accept it as your engagement ring."

Severus brought out his wand and spoke a "*Lumos*" spell so that Hermione could properly see the ring in its velvet cushion. The gemstone was a large square-cut emerald of startling clarity, set in a gold facing engraved with many overlappings of the letter "S." The aged gold was delicately burnished, reflecting the ring's antiquity.

Hermione found that she could not speak, as huge tears flooded her eyes and splashed down upon Severus' hands.

Severus shifted his weight, watching her uneasily. "Is it horrible?" he asked her uncertainly. It had looked like a perfectly adequate ring to him. He was no judge of such things, but the setting was neither too large nor too ornate, and it had the added attraction of being a valuable family heirloom. Surely most witches would be pleased by that fact?

Hermione pressed her hands to her burning cheeks. "It's beautiful, Severus. I never expected something like this! Oh, thank you!"

Severus passed a neatly pressed handkerchief to her, not letting her see the vast relief he felt at her reaction. Hermione dried her eyes, then tucked the handkerchief into her pocket.

"Let's see if it fits," Severus said softly.

He took her left hand and slid the ring onto her third finger, pleased to see that it slipped easily over her knuckle. For a moment they both gazed down at the Snape family heirloom engagement ring, then Severus lifted her hand to his lips and pressed a kiss just below where the ring rested, as he looked deeply into her eyes.

"Will you make me the happiest man alive by doing me the honour of becoming my wife?" he asked her in a voice thick with emotion.

Her answer was to slip off the log to her knees, twining her arms tightly about him and speaking her answer with her lips pressed to the pulse beating beneath his jaw.

"Yes, please, oh, yes, Severus."

The moon continued to rise, becoming smaller in the sky, as the lovers sealed their troth in the soft summer grass on the banks of the Hogwarts lake. The breezes wafted across the water and through the trees, and if any animals heard the sighs and gasps and shouts of their raw, exquisite ecstasy, none stirred from the wood to investigate.

Perhaps a human or two, pacing ancient stone halls not far away, were aware of the nocturnal activities of the Enchanted lovers in the glade; they, however, valued their own lives highly enough that they chose not to interrupt these powerful paramours on this magical night of soul-binding promises and star-dusted dreams.

A/N: I will admit that I have been asked why Severus is proposing after the wedding has been planned. The actual proposal, as it were, took place in Master of Enchantment and was informal, to say the least. I felt that Severus, being a formal sort of man, would do the thing properly once he had a proper ring for her. The line "raw, exquisite ecstasy" comes from the song *Say What You Mean* by Justin Hayward, of the Moody Blues; the song appears on their 1991 album, *Keys of the Kingdom*. I also must give credit to my Slytherin of a husband, who came up with the marvellous idea about what Gilderoy Lockhart's next career might be and how he might terrorise the Weasley/Lovegood wedding.