



Unbeknownst to Harry, a tracking charm and disclosure spell had been placed on his wand. While the Dream Team was preparing to follow Malfoy, Harry's intentions had been telegraphed to the Order of the Phoenix and one, Albus Dumbledore, in particular. It was only a matter of minutes before the Order had arrived. It had been all over but the shouting as they say.

Whatever joy Harry had felt at the destruction of Voldemort was nothing compared to the happiness he'd felt at finding out the Headmaster had been alive all along. However, warring emotions emerged as the reason for this deception was explained.

Severus had often expressed doubt as to whether Harry would be able to cast the Killing Curse when the time came. While the Headmaster maintained the death of his parents would be enough to validate his anger, he, too, had a few doubts of his own. Harry may have loved his parents, their death and sacrifice weighing heavily on his heart, but the truth was that he'd never known them.

After much deliberation, Dumbledore had come up with a plan to "energize" Harry's emotions and at the same time allow Severus to "prove" his loyalty to Voldemort. The information from Voldemort's inner circle was scant. If the Order members were going to come out the victor in this battle of good and evil, they would have to take a few calculated risks.

Severus had known of Draco's mission; they'd been counting on the fact that the boy had not been able to follow through on any of his previous attempts. The spell Severus had cast on Albus was more of a light show than the Killing Curse. Severus was surprised Bellatrix never questioned why the body flew back against the wall, no sound accompanying the deadly curse as the green light enveloped its target. Minerva had been in on the deception from the start. As the new acting Headmistress, she had been able to duplicate the body while acting as Dumbledore's Secret Keeper while Severus, once again, had been accepted back into Voldemort's inner circle.

It had given the Order the edge it needed. With Severus's inside information on the remaining Horcrux being passed on in secret to Minerva and the Order, it had only been a matter of time before Potter would destroy them and defeat Voldemort.

It had taken another two weeks, and testimony from McGonagall under Veritaserum, before the Ministry would acknowledge that they might've been wrong about Snape.

Public outcry had called for his blood over the "murder" of Albus Dumbledore. Even Albus showing up alive at Severus's trial had done little to help matters. Most had claimed it was a devious Slytherin ruse to save the Potion master's hide someone Polyjuiced to look like Albus. The Wizengamot had sat tensely for just over an hour, waiting for the Polyjuice to wear off and expose the fake Dumbledore. When the magical timer had chimed and Dumbledore, smiling, offered the esteemed gathering a lemon sherbet, they'd been forced to concede that it might actually be Albus Dumbledore they were looking at.

"I believe the rumors of my death have been greatly exaggerated." Dumbledore's comment and subsequent laughter had been lost in the sudden clamor, as they'd tried to figure out what to do with Severus.

Eventually, the matter was settled, and Snape was set free.

Once again he fell back on the Headmaster's good graces and was teaching Potions at Hogwarts. The most satisfying event of all had been Dumbledore's surprising suggestion that he only teach the upper level classes, no longer subjecting himself to those dunderheads forced to take Potions because of curriculum requirements. The students in his NEWT classes, much smaller classes thankfully, were committed to actually learning a thoroughly refreshing idea. This new adjustment also allowed him to teach a few of the upper level Defense Against the Dark Arts classes at the same time. It would have been an idyllic life if it had not been marred by the presence of the woman who was now occupying his lab and generally making his life miserable.

Hermione Granger, know-it-all and general annoyance, was quite capable of handling his classes from beginning Potions on up to OWL level classes, though possessing none of his flair for opening lectures if anyone had bothered to ask him, while pursuing an apprenticeship in Charms. The fact that it freed him to experiment and research as he chose did not change the fact that her very existence was a thorn in his side.

He supposed it could've been worse; Potter could've taken a teaching position at the school, too. As things stood now, he found himself forced to work with the young woman on an almost daily basis as she helped him brew a new experimental potion designed to trace the magical aura given off by the Dark Mark, thus helping the Wizengamot find and round up the remaining Death Eaters.

There were days he was sure the universe was having a good laugh at his expense.

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Hermione paused, looking thoughtfully at the cauldron gently bubbling between them.

"What?" he snarled, knowing *that look* after teaching the wretched young woman for six long years.

"Well, I know you're using the base of the potion I developed to track Apparation trajectories, but you seem to have forgotten an ingredient. I don't see the mashed foxglove around here anywhere."

"I'm sorry. I was not aware you were awarded a Masters in potion making. Let's just chuck my last thirty years out the window, shall we, and you can develop the potion on your own. Perhaps you might even permit me to assist you, Miss Granger. I do so hope one day to have a lab of my own." His chopping blade slammed against the workbench, his eyes flashing fire as he dared the girl to answer him.

"Really, you don't have to get all huffy. I merely asked a question. I never claimed to be an expert at potions, but it ~~was~~ *was* my potion that tracked Draco!" Hermione shouted, standing with her hands on her hips, glaring back at the insufferable man.

"We need to alter *your* original potion to trace the Dark Marks," he bit out between clenched teeth. Returning to Azkaban was looking better and better every day now that they had replaced the Dementors with giants. At the very least, he would have peace and quiet again.

"And the 'Coq de Leon,' is he part of this alteration?"

Severus continued to glare at the young woman.

"Well, what other reason could there be for you having a live rooster in your lab?"

"Maybe I'm fond of him. Maybe he's my familiar."

"Oh, really? What's his name?"

"His name?" Severus closed his eyes; he could feel a headache coming on. Was there no way to shut the witch up?

"Yes, if he truly is your pet, he would have a name." Hermione's smug smile did nothing to alleviate the pain blooming behind his eyes. "Can we stop playing games and just be straightforward with each other?"

Severus eyed the young woman. "Fine, the rooster is from the village of Leon in Spain. A village so secret that only a few wizards know of its existence. It is my belief that the blood from this rooster, mixed with your tracking potion, will help to locate the Dark Marks of the remaining Death Eaters, wherever they may be hiding."

Hermione stood transfixed as she listened to the dark man finally explaining the potion they'd been working on. "Wow. What will you do with him when we're through?"

"I don't know, Miss Granger. Perhaps I will give him to the house-elves, and we can have him for dinner. Can we get back to creating the potion now, or is there something

else you would like to discuss?"

"You're going to kill him? You can't eat Bob. I won't let you."

Severus's looked at the witch in confusion. "Bob? Who is Bob?"

Hermione pointed to the rooster quietly pecking away at his feed in the corner of the lab. "You can't kill something you name. And I'm not going to let you kill him."

"Bob? You named my Coq Bob?" his voice registering disbelief. Whoever heard of a rooster named Bob?

Hermione blushed at the implication of his statement.

Severus's snorted, taking note of the witch's coloring. "Oh, do grow up, Miss Granger. I was referring to the rooster *Bob*," he said mockingly.

"Yes, well, I suppose Leon would have been more appropriate, but Bob was the first name that jumped into my mind. However, the fact remains, I'm not going to let you kill him."

"Another one of your causes, Miss Granger? What shall you call your crusade this time? Perhaps you could start a Society for the Ethical Treatment of Coqs?"

"S.E.T.C.s?" Hermione's blush deepened as the phonetic sound of the initials reverberated in her mind. "Who's acting childish now?"

"Enough. You may keep the cock. Call him anything you like. Once I extract his blood, I have no further use for him. May we get back to work now?"

"Yes, thank you..." 'In for a penny, in for a pound,' she thought. Taking a deep breath, she said quietly, "Severus."

The Potion master's eyebrows rose sharply in disbelief. "I beg your pardon? What did you just call me?" The silky tone in his voice did little to disguise the danger his words implied.

"We've been working together for two months now. I'm not your student. You're the only one on the faculty I still address as professor, and frankly, it's starting to annoy me." Hermione held her breath, waiting for the explosion she was sure would follow.

"Very well, *Hermione*, may we get back to the task at hand?"

"Yes, of course."

The rest of the afternoon passed uneventfully, the potion entering the fourth stage of brewing sometime around dinnertime that evening.

Severus set the magical timer to read twenty-two hours, the remaining brewing time needed before adding the Coq's blood. "Tomorrow marks a Hogsmeade weekend. It might be a good time to add *Bob's* blood and try out the potion. Meet me here at 2:45 tomorrow. We'll extract the blood and run our tests then."

Hermione looked questioningly at Severus. "How will we know the potion's worked?"

Roughly, he pulled up his left cuff, exposing his Dark Mark. "Because a known Death Eater will hide somewhere in the castle. Let's see if you can find me."

Hermione stared at his forearm. "Severus, I'm sorry. I didn't mean..."

"Don't forget to feed Bob tonight. If you're going to keep him, you might as well start taking care of him." Severus grabbed his frock coat off the back table. "Good night, *Hermione*." With a slam, the dark man disappeared through a hidden door.

Hermione stood staring at the blank spot on the wall where Severus had disappeared, the hidden door once again hidden. It never occurred to her to think of him as a Death Eater. He'd been a loyal member of the Order. It really hadn't occurred to her what it meant when he'd said they would "test" the potion tomorrow. She felt an overwhelming need to speak with him, to apologize for her thoughtlessness. They seemed to have gained ground tonight, only to lose whatever start at friendship they might've eventually reached.

"Severus?" Hermione knocked on the blank wall. "Severus, please open up. I want to apologize." Though in truth, she wasn't sure what she should apologize for.

She stood quietly, waiting to see if he would open the doorway.

"Severus, I know you're in there. Please open up. I'm sorry, I didn't think. It's just ... I don't know. I don't think of you that way." Frustrated, Hermione kicked the wall before turning back to the lab.

"First you claim you wish to apologize; then you attack my wall. Which is it to be?"

His quiet voice startled the witch.

"Severus! I'm sorry if I insulted you. I didn't mean to. I just don't think of you as a Death Eater."

His arms were crossed resolutely across his chest, blocking out her and everything around him. "And *how* do you think of me?" He couldn't say why, but her opinion of him mattered at that moment.

"I think of you as a fellow Order member. I would like to think of you as a friend." Hermione noted the dark man's glare. "All right, fine. You're not a friend. But I was hoping we might become friendlier with time."

"Tired of tea with Minerva already?" He really couldn't blame the girl. She was stuck in a castle with ancient witches and wizards. In the last two months, he'd only seen her leave the castle one weekend. The remainder of time had been spent with him, researching and brewing the potion. He was closer to her age than anyone else on the faculty, and he was still nineteen years older than her. "What about your friends?"

Hermione sighed. "They're all too busy to visit. Harry's off playing Quidditch, and when he does show up, he and Ginny disappear to God knows where. Ron is busy studying at the Auror Academy. I could visit Fred and George, but they're always so busy developing new products for the joke shop. And I really have no desire to become a test subject again after the last time they snuck those exploding quills in my bookbag. Neville and Luna are busy building a magical greenhouse. Everyone is out doing ... something."

And she'd been stuck here, working with him. "Longbottom is opening a greenhouse?" Severus shook his head. "Maybe we stopped the Dark Lord too soon."

Hermione stared in disbelief. "Did you just attempt a joke? A bad joke really, but it was a joke."

"I never joke."

"You just did."

"What will you do now that the potion is almost complete?"

"I don't know. Maybe I'll reread my way through the Restricted Section again."

Severus snorted, not really believing he was about to ask the witch if she wanted to help him with his private research. He stared appraisingly at the young woman. She had proved to be a capable assistant, intuitively understanding steps in the potion making process they had not covered in class. "Why did you decide to apprentice in Charms? Your knowledge of Potions would have gained you an apprenticeship with any number of Potions masters."

"Yes, well..." Hermione measured the feed for Bob, clucking softly to the rooster as he watched her.

"You couldn't ask me for a recommendation. You would have hardly needed it. Before the Wizengamot freed me, a recommendation from me would have been the same as marking you as a fellow Death Eater."

"But it's not the same now, is it?"

"Hermione, I should never have survived the war. Truly I didn't expect to. What I think doesn't matter." Severus squared his shoulders, finally coming to a decision. "Finish feeding the ruddy cock and follow me. I don't have all day."

"All day for what?" Hastily she replaced the feed, raising the wards again around Bob so he would stay "penned" in the corner.

"If you wish to help me research a new potion I have been working on, you'll need to read my notes to bring yourself up to speed. It won't do to have you muck up the works before we really get started. Come along. Don't touch anything. Several of the books in here have been known to 'touch' back." Severus turned and walked back through the doorway.

"You're asking me to work with you? As your assistant?"

"Ah, there's that formidable mind we've all heard so much about." Severus stopped and looked back at Hermione. "Are you coming, Miss Granger, or have you decided to run screaming from my lair, never to darken my doorway again?"

"It's Hermione, remember? And you don't scare me, Severus Snape. Lead on." Hermione smiled up at the dark man, a thrill running through her as she noticed the half smile that graced his lips.

"Indeed."

As the young woman crossed the threshold, the magical doorway closed behind her, once again leaving an unbroken wall to all but the untrained eye. Bob, oblivious to the witch and wizard's coming and going, continued to eat his feed.

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Hermione hummed as she made her way to the Great Hall, her arms loaded down with several tomes she wanted to show Severus. It had been awkward at first, but once he'd showed her his research on reversing the effects of Unforgivable Curses, their differences seemed to melt away. She'd always thought him brilliant, but the research he had shown her showed a new side to his personality, as well. They'd gotten into several loud and angry debates, both enjoying the challenge of proving the other one wrong. She couldn't wait to finish the potion this afternoon and start on the next project with him.

Hermione juggled the books she was carrying, barely managing to open the staff door with her free hand. She spotted Harry sitting half way down the table. "Harry, what are you doing here?"

"Hi, I was just waiting for Ginny to come down." Harry eyed the stack of books Hermione dropped on the table. "Honestly, Hermione, don't you ever get tired of studying?"

"No, not really. So, what are you doing here?"

"It's a Hogsmeade weekend. I was going to take Ginny into town. Care to come with us?"

"No, thanks. I have a few tests to run in the lab with Severus this afternoon." Hermione cracked the top book open, flipping pages as she loaded her plate.

"Severus? Since when is the great git Severus?"

"Since I've been working on a new potion with him for the last two months."

"But ... Severus?"

"Honestly, Harry, you know he was on the same side we were."

"Are you sure you wouldn't rather go into Hogsmeade with Ginny and me?"

"Thanks, but I can't." Hermione shook her head, glancing at her watch. "Ack, look at the time! I told Severus I would take care of Bob at one, and it's a quarter after now." Hermione pushed away from the table taking a last bite of her sandwich as she grabbed for the stack of books.

"Bob?"

"Severus's cock. Honestly, I've never seen a cock that big. He's amazing, really. I need to prep him before we can finish the potion this afternoon."

"You named his... you call..." Harry's eyes widened in shock, his brain refusing to process Hermione's comment. "Bob?"

Hermione started laughing. "Oh, grow up, Harry. Bob is Severus's rooster. He's a 'Coq de Leon.' He's the reason the Dark Mark locator potion may actually work. Really, as if I would call his..."

"Fine." Harry held up his hand to stop any further comments on his friend's part. It seemed the git and his friend had become friendlier, a lot friendlier toward one another recently. He didn't think he could go on if Hermione and the git were... "I don't need to know about your, uhm, sex life."

"And I have no intentions of telling you." Hermione held the door open, pausing at the threshold. "Really, men naming their members Bob. How childish can you get?"

Weakly, Harry chuckled. "Yeah, well, it sort of sounded that way."

"Bob, how ridiculous." Hermione shook her head. "I prefer to call *his* cock Richard. It's so much more dignified than Bob." The door closed soundly behind her, but not before she heard the sound of her friend, hitting the floor, when her comment penetrated the fog in his brain.

'Honestly, boys can be so childish,' she thought, humming as she headed for the Potions lab.

-Fini-

A/N: This is in response to a comment Shiv made over a year ago. She thought it would be funny if someone wrote a story, using the first line as it appears in this story. I started to write this and "put it down" with the intention of coming back to it. I never did until now. I came across the first half of the story the other day, liked it enough to polish it up and finish it off. More of Dances and Choices in the works, this is just a brain fart, if you will.

From: [http://www.flyfishinghistory.com/coq\\_de\\_leon.htm](http://www.flyfishinghistory.com/coq_de_leon.htm):

*'Coq de Leon' hackles are long-fabled, but are seldom seen outside Spain, perhaps because Leon is a secret place, surrounded by mountains on three sides and open only to an eastern approach. The winters there are hard and the summers hot, in a mixed agricultural landscape where languid rivers winding between poplar-lined banks feed the cornfields. ...*

The actual Mark Twain quote is "The report of my death was an exaggeration."

I'd like to express my grateful thanks to Southern\_witch\_69, who stepped in to beta this at the last minute. The mistakes, however, are still mine.

Pearle

Chicago 9/2005 to 11/2006