

Finding the Words

by *Southern_Witch_69*

Hermione and Severus are forced to admit their feelings after tragedy strikes.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: The characters aren't mine.

SW says: I wrote this for Warded_Portal last year, who was kind enough to respond to a post I made in my LJ in which I asked for prompts.

Her requests were:

Pairing: Hermione/Severus

Prompt: Professors Granger and Snape realize they are in love with each other.

Thanks go to my beta for this story, NotSoSaintly.

When Severus asked Hermione to join him on his walk to the apothecary in Hogsmeade, she'd readily agreed, justifying her decision by saying she could make certain that none of the students, who were visiting the town that day, were up to mischief. They'd already gone to the shop, and Severus had asked if she might like to have lunch with him at the Three Broomsticks since they were in town and since it was past noon.

She agreed with a smile. "I was just thinking the same thing."

"Excellent," he commented. "Minerva told me that the food has improved greatly since Rosmerta found a new cook."

Stopping and placing a hand on his arm, Hermione said, "Severus, I'm going to Scrivenshaft's to see if their new shipment of pheasant-feather quills has come in today. I'll just meet you at the Three Broomsticks if you don't mind." She'd noticed the shop around the corner. "You might need to hold a table for us."

"Very well," he said with a nod. "Would you like me to order for you if there's a table available? Same as last time?"

"Oh, yes, please." She didn't miss the fact that he remembered what she'd eaten the last time they'd shared a meal there. Truth be known, she remembered his order as well. It pleased her that they'd become so close. He was a good man and a great friend.

"I'll see you there."

Smiling fondly, she watched as he continued walking down the street, long strides carrying him away from her quickly. With a sigh, she turned and made her way into the shop, stopping at a large display on her left to inspect the stationery. *Severus uses this*, she thought, running a finger over the thick, cream-colored parchment. She wondered if he needed any more, but she decided against buying him any. He'd acted so strangely the last time she'd bought him something, and she didn't care for that to

happen again.

"Hullo, Hermione."

"Oliver! It's been a long time," she said with a smile.

"It certainly has." He gave her a small hug. "So, how's little Wood doing in your classes? Any better since he joined that study group?"

"Well," she began, "I can honestly say that his charmwork has improved, but it seems that his heart still isn't in it. Sometimes he doesn't even turn in his assignments, and detention doesn't seem to faze him. If he doesn't make an 'Exceeds Expectations' on his O.W.L. test, I'm afraid he will not be able to take the N.E.W.T. classes with me."

Nodding, Oliver said, "I understand. I'll talk to him about working a little harder." He looked around quickly and lowered his voice, asking, "Do you know if he is still involved with that Fancourt girl?"

Hermione's brow furrowed as she tried to think of any instances where she'd seen them together. "Hmm. Actually, no, now that you mention it. He's mostly keeping to himself...not even eating meals with his friend, Warrington."

Wood shook his head sadly. "My wife says that the girl broke things off with him, but he intended on winning her back. I believe the fickle child decided that she wanted to date his friend instead."

"Ouch," Hermione said in commiseration. "What a blow."

"Yes," he agreed. "Say, Hermione, what ever happened with you and Weasley?"

"After I started working at Hogwarts, things changed. He didn't like staying here with me, and he hated staying in our flat alone." She shrugged. "I don't think we would have worked out anyway. In fact, when Flitwick retired, I was quite happy to accept the invitation to apply for his job."

"Well, as long as you're happy," he said. "I have to go down to Honeydukes to pay for my boy's tab, something I worked out with Mr. Flume, but I hope to see you soon."

"Take care." It saddened her that his son had changed so much. He used to be one of her favorite students. Pushing those thoughts away, she gazed back down at the stationery, deciding to buy a pack for Severus regardless if he needed it or not. In fact, he probably needed a new quill as well.

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As Severus passed in front of the post office, Ambrosius Flume called out to him. "Professor Snape! Just the man I was looking for! I expect you'll be getting an owl from me shortly. Just sent off a letter, see."

"Mr. Flume," he greeted with a nod. "You wanted to speak with me?"

"The bloke I get me temporary anti-gravity potion from won't be making them any longer. He's dead, see, and I remember you said you could easily make batches for us if we needed you to." He flashed a toothy grin. "I need it to add to me Fizzing Whizbees, else we won't levitate when we eat them."

This would be a chance for him to make some extra money, so Severus definitely wanted the opportunity; however, he didn't want to appear too eager. "I can certainly think about the terms. Is the information enclosed in your letter?"

"That it is, yes."

"Excellent. I am meeting someone at the Three Broomsticks, so I must take my leave. I will read..."

"Just one more moment of your time," the man said, pointing to the small alley behind him. "If you please."

"Only a moment," he said firmly, following the man off the busy street. He wanted to get to the pub and order lunch before Hermione arrived.

Voice low, Flume asked, "You wouldn't be interested in making something else, would ya?"

Severus felt his stomach clench. Was the man going to ask him to brew something illegal? "I make many potions, Mr. Flume, and there are only a few that you, being a sweetshop owner, should be interested in." He hoped his tone would put the man off of asking for anything improper.

"Right. Right." He wrung his hands nervously. "See, it's not for me shop, no. It's for me wife."

"What is it?" he asked, patience thinning. He'd rather be talking to Hermione than standing in an alley speaking with a man who couldn't find the right words to explain what he needed.

"I can't just go into the apothecary and ask for it. She'd kill me for sure. Word would get around, it would."

Snape simply arched an eyebrow and said nothing, though he hoped the man would stop sidestepping and get on with it.

"Always has a headache when the lights go out."

"A dose of headache potion should suffice," he said. "I am not a Healer, however, so you..."

"No, it's not really a headache, mind." He leaned forward and winked.

"Are you winking at me?" Severus asked sharply, stepping back and wondering what the man was on about, fingers tightly gripping his wand.

"I mean to say that she's not in the mood.... See?"

"You want an aphrodisiac." Severus was able to keep the smirk from his face, though he couldn't help thinking *If I had a woman in my bed at night, she certainly wouldn't need it.* A vision of Hermione's smiling face flitted through his mind before he listened to the man's rambling again.

"Right! You can see why I can't just go to anyone, eh? I thought on it and expect you'll keep it private enough...for the right money."

"Let me get back to you on that," Severus said noncommittally, hoping the man would take the hint that he needed to leave. "We'll speak of it when we discuss the terms of the potion you want me to make."

"Absolutely. Go on then. I can see you're wanting to go off to your meeting, what with the way you're shifting about." He grabbed Severus' hand with his thick, meaty ones and shook it vigorously. "Thank you. I have to get back to me shop anyway. Been right busy today, we have."

"Is that right?"

"Indeed it is. Indeed. Just afore I left, young Johnny Wood came in to get thirty Exploding Dragons...made of cinnamon and spicy as the dickens, those! Said he's got plans to give them to his friends. Even said he bought some of those magical fireworks from Zonko's. Right nice lad." He frowned. "Of course I hope his dad comes along and

pays for it today."

"I'm certain he will. Good day, Mr. Flume."

Finally able to get away from the man, Severus walked towards the Three Broomsticks, wondering if Hermione had passed without noticing him as he talked to Flume. Just before he entered the pub, a medium-sized, tawny owl swooped down on him, letter attached to its leg. He quickly took the letter and placed it in his pocket. While he watched the owl take flight, there was a loud bang behind him, and everything went dark.

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Hermione heard a loud noise and saw smoke rising from the Three Broomsticks. Even as she watched, part of the building broke away from the main section. "Oh, God, Severus!" She ran as quickly as she could, pushing past the people who were simply gaping at the scene before them. Part of the building had been blasted off and was on fire...though the fire was being put out already, thanks to nearby patrons and their wands...and rubble littered the side of the building. People were leaving through the front entrance and through the gaping hole, but she didn't see Severus amongst them.

"He must still be inside," she said to herself, forcing her way through the crowd.

"Watch it!" someone said, pushing her back.

"Don't go in there, Professor Granger! The whole building might come down," someone else said.

Many voices rang out around her...people were crying, some shouting. Not heeding their warnings, she pushed inside, coughing as some of the smoke filled her lungs, prepared to hex anyone who tried to stop her. "Severus!" she called. When there was no response, fear began building and tears began falling from her eyes. As she finally reached the far side of the room where most of the rubble and smoldering wood was located, she saw a man frantically flicking his wand to move fallen beams and stone.

"Hermione! Are you here? Can you hear me?" he asked, worry filling his voice.

"I'm here!" she said, realizing it was Severus.

He spun around to face her, eyes wide, face covered in soot and sporting a small, bloody scratch near his hairline. "I thought you might have been trapped inside!"

"No, I wasn't here," she said and ran to him, arms open. He pulled her to him and held her tightly, causing her to sob loudly. "I thought you were in here! I heard the explosion and saw the smoke and the building crumble!"

"Shhh. I'm all right," he said softly, squeezing her tightly. "We need to get out of this room before the ceiling comes down completely. I don't know if the magic will hold it much longer, especially if there's another explosion."

Still clinging to him, she allowed him to lead her outside, not caring who saw them. Although the streets were filled with people, many Apparating in after learning there was an explosion, she felt as though only she and Severus were there.

"I thought I'd lost you," she said, finally looking up into his eyes. "Since you returned to teaching at the castle, you've slowly become a good friend to me. I just couldn't bear to not have you as part of my life."

He cupped her face with his hands and wiped the tears from her cheeks with his thumbs. "I feared you were inside as well. I am thankful that you were not. I couldn't..."

"Couldn't?"

"Stand to lose you either."

She realized that he was shaking, adrenaline pumping through his body. And to have him admit to her that he wouldn't want to be without her either made her feel lighter than air. Impulsively, she said, "These four years... I've fallen in love with you. You're everywhere I look...in the castle, at the lake, in the quill shop, in my dreams...." She bit her lip and shook her head in amazement. "I never realized it until just now...until it was nearly too late. *I love you,*" she repeated, mostly just to hear herself say it.

His lips pressing against hers was his response to her declaration. Lifting her arms to circle his neck, she leaned into him, parted her lips, and accepted him completely, wanting him to know that she wanted his kiss, his touch...*loved* him! When they finally parted for air and slowly pulled back to gaze at each other, Severus gave her a small smile while brushing back a few errant strands of hair from her face.

"Have you nothing to say?" she whispered after a few moments.

"I thought I just did," he said, face inching back towards hers, lips brushing hers. "Shall I say it again?"

"Yes... so long as you say it often and everyday from now on," she quipped.

"Your suggestion is acceptable," he said before intensifying their kiss, tongue tangling with hers.

"Bloody hell!" someone said, bringing Hermione back to reality, making her aware again that they were not alone. She feared it would be someone gaping at them, but when she opened her eyes to see who'd said it, she noticed that everyone was pointing to a group of Aurors, who were surrounding someone.

"Caught the bugger, they did," a fat man with long, ratty hair said.

To Hermione's surprise, Harry broke away from the other Aurors and made his way to her. "All right, Hermione?"

"Yes, we weren't inside when it exploded." She nodded towards Severus as she spoke, pleased he hadn't released her from his hold. "What's happened? Who did this? Why?"

Eyeing her peculiarly but not saying anything, he explained, "Oliver Wood's son did this...purposely too."

Hermione gasped. "I was just speaking with Oliver over at Scrivenshaft's! Oh, no, is he all right?"

"Nobody's died if that's what you mean, but I think the boy's a bit mental myself." He looked back. "Right. I'm going with Kingsley to take him in. I'll explain more later."

"Take care." She watched him leave and sadly said, "That boy, according to his father, is quite upset about a girl breaking things off with him. Love certainly can make some people do some crazy things."

Severus nodded. "Not thinking of my own safety, I ran into a burning, collapsing building to save the woman I love." He kissed her lips softly. "Sometimes our emotions get the best of us."

Tears formed anew in her eyes with his verbal admission. "Let's go back to the castle and inform Minerva about what's happened," she said with a smile. "And then we can continue our little conversation...the one we were having before..."

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SW69's Notes: You know how you sometimes don't realize how special something is until you lose it or nearly lose it? I thought that might work as a plot device to force their feelings out. Hope you enjoyed.