

A Matter of Perspective

by averygoodun

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the only one

Chapter 1 of 1

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I thought he was daft.

I still think he was daft, the old fool, but he may have been onto something. After all, how else can I explain the sight of Miss Granger kissing me? Or rather, how else can I explain the sight of Miss Granger kissing my visage, for she isn't kissing me.

Not that I'd want her to. No. Not at all. But there she stands, snuggled against a man who is my exact double in everything but my past. And the only reason I can come up with for her to be accepting of his attentions is that he is obviously in love with her.

I mean, he has the same face as me, same complexion, same hair, same bony frame. He has the same biting wit that most people consider hateful. He sneers just as often as I do, although he does seem to smile a lot more, especially around her.

For all intents and purposes, he is me... except he loves her, and she loves him.

I don't understand how he can be with her. Maybe it's because he didn't teach her; he did say that he'd never seen her before. I find it hard to believe, and yet, that's the only difference.

He admitted to murdering his headmaster and seems just as damaged by that as I am. His soul is as torn and wretched as mine, and he has the physical Mark to prove it. He is as demanding and insistent upon perfection as I am, to the point of obsession and degradation even. He is bitter and conniving, battered by society and shunted to both sides. He is lost. When he arrived, he was only barely on this side of redemption, just as I am now.

Yes, the only difference between us is that he never knew Hermione as a child, so he was introduced to a beautiful, intelligent, vivacious and brave woman, rather than a bushy-haired, buck-toothed know-it-all.

He didn't watch her make the progression from an awkward, socially inept swot-of-a-swot to the confident girl who stole Viktor Krum's heart. He didn't see her slow transformation into the impressive young woman who coached and supported her friends when they came face to face with evil. He didn't see that young woman shatter, then cobble herself back together again after her lover died saving her. He didn't witness her entrance into full maturity as she mourned.

He didn't see that. All he saw, when he popped into existence, was a beautiful woman with compassionate and intelligent eyes.

If I saw Miss Granger without the baggage of Hogwarts on my back, would I love her as he does? Would she be Miss Granger, or would she be introduced as Hermione, as she was to him? Would that make a difference? I think that if I were introduced to Miss Granger Hermione without having been her teacher, she might smile at me as she does him. She might see in me the potential she obviously sees in him. She might not see me as a bitter, hateful man who has made too many mistakes in too short a span. She might see me as a blank slate.

But see, there's the problem. She had me for a teacher, and yet there she is, in his arms. She had the bad history with me the nasty comments, the calculated bias against her and her friends, not to mention the crushing breach of trust my supposed betrayal wrought and yet she's snuggled up against him.

It doesn't make sense.

How is it that she can look into his face and not think of how I treated her as a child? How can she let him kiss her without the memory of me poisoning every taste he offers?

Is love really that powerful? Or did he simply fulfill something in her that she was lacking? When he arrived and looked upon her, he didn't sneer. He didn't jeer. He didn't do anything. He just stood transfixed as he looked at her in a way the rest of us hadn't dared. He saw her as a woman, plain and simple.

And, I suppose, that was what she needed.

Weasley, for all his numerous faults and failures, had given her that strength. It took some time, but he had seen and treated her as a beautiful woman. He had loved her, and that love gave her the confidence that had revealed her beauty to the rest of the world.

Without his love...

But who was going to step up and offer her comfort and love after he died? None of us ... *none* of us ... wanted to insult her or sully the memory of Weasley. No one wanted to suffer comparison with a martyr.

Really, thinking about it, my doppelganger arrived in the nick of time. Hermione had started wilting. Most everyone was too busy celebrating or planning to notice her descent, and possibly, that was the reason she was fading.

I did notice, but... I didn't think she would appreciate words of comfort from this embittered man. I didn't think she would want anything to do with me, not after all I had done to her. Had Potter been there, I might have approached him about her, but he wasn't. Nor was Minerva, the werewolf, Tonks, or any of the faces she knew, loved or trusted. That was a large part of the problem.

Seeing her fade away in front of my eyes was too painful to witness, thinking that there was nothing I could do. I had just made up my mind to turn my back when *he* showed up and stared.

Had I known that the solution was so simple, and that I could have helped, I would have acted. But I didn't. And now she's smiling again ... at him.

It's bittersweet, seeing her so. I am happy to see her reviving, but at the same time, my guardianship is finally at an end. I won't witness any more of her life. She isn't in need of a teacher anymore, which, now that she is finally coming into her full potential, is truly frustrating. I had to deal with her insufferable attitude, incessant questions and intolerable youth only to leave her be once she's grown past that. The irony.

Minerva, Filius, and even Hagrid kept in touch with their favorites, but for me to do so, for me to single out Miss Granger, would be seen as something more than a friendly overture. Especially now that everyone has seen her in those arms. They'd call me a bad sport, or worse, jealous.

And I hate that they'd be right.

She's happy now. I will be content with that. I will leave them to their peace and cede my stewardship over to him.

Maybe a cup of tea would soothe me before I turn my back for good.

"You've noticed her."

Perhaps I should have foregone the tea and simply left while I was ahead. Instead, here I am, confronted with the smug image of myself.

"I have known Miss Granger for some time now."

"Yes, yes, I know. But you've finally looked at her as more than your charge, correct?"

Something about the way he says that gives me pause. Why is he asking me? What does he want? Have I been more obvious than I thought?

"No, no one suspects you feel anything other than contempt for the girl," my double tells me, leaning against the wall with deliberate ease and smirking mockingly.

Quickly, I shield my mind from any further invasion, but he just grins.

"I don't need to use Legilimency to know how you feel, Severus. We are very much alike."

"Don't insult me."

He snorts in amusement. "Insult you? How is it that I've insulted you? No one, not even Hermione, can deny how similar we are. If we exchanged places, I doubt anyone would notice, we are so similar."

"What are you playing at, Snape?" I growl, not liking where this is going. He has something in mind, some ruse, and I will not be a part of it.

He stops smirking, pushing himself off the wall, and walks toward me.

"I'm not playing at anything, Severus. I am simply telling you that for all anyone knows, I could be you."

Taking three quick steps forward, I grab his robes and pull him toward me.

"If you persist in taunting me, you will be the one to disappear." He is smirking again and shows no trace of fear, only amusement. Pushing him away from me in disgust, I say, "I will not be part of any games you wish to play, Snape, especially if you are intending to make a fool out of either me or Miss Granger."

"You are willfully misunderstanding me, Severus. What I said is what I meant: *I could be you*"

He smoothes his robes out where I grabbed him, then reaches into a breast pocket, pulling out a tiny silver hourglass on a chain.

"A week per turn," he says, putting the device and chain in my hand.

My eyes are riveted on the Time Turner. I have never seen one so small or one that shimmers like moving water. I slowly realize it seems liquid because it is constantly disappearing and reappearing at a dizzying rate.

"Go save our love," he whispers.

Before I'm aware I'm doing it, I'm turning the hourglass over and over in my hand. Four turns, five, six, seven.

Seven weeks I've jealously watched myself court Hermione. For seven weeks, I've watched her return to life. For seven weeks I've been denying how much I've grown to love her and bitterly decrying fate's immensely cruel sense of humor. Seven weeks, the world has been spinning around me, taunting me with what might have been.

Suddenly, the world stops spinning, and there she is.

She is so very beautiful.

"Professor?" she asks, looking between me and my other self with confusion and not a slight amount of alarm.

I feel a wondrous smile taking over my face as I shake my head.

"I have never seen you before, my lady," I say, and it's true. I never ~~have~~ seen her before. Not like this.

When she blushes and tentatively smiles back at me, I realize that, daft or not, perhaps Albus was right about love. Perhaps it can solve anything.

~fin~

AN: *This was my entry in the Wlinter 2006 SS/HG Exchange... poor Imogen. She deserved better. ;-)*

Thanks to Sun for betaing this for me. I would be lost in misused commas were it not for her.