

Sacrifice

by Crazyed88

In response to a challenge set on Ashwinder -Hermione is about to get married when a certain Potions master realizes she should marry him instead. He has forty-eight hours to stop the wedding and get her to marry him.

Sacrifice

Chapter 1 of 1

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This story was entered in the Sycophant Hex: Spring Faire Festival under the General Story: I Want to Kiss the Bride.

The criteria is below:

Summary: Hermione is about to get married when a certain Potions master realizes she should marry him instead. He has forty-eight hours to stop the wedding and get her to marry him.

Rules:

- 1. Severus Snape is to be portrayed by Severus Snape. He does not have really silky hair. His nose is hooked, not aquiline. In other words, keep the Snape as close to canon as possible, in both appearance, and characterization.*
- 2. Snape does not kill the other canon male involved (i.e. potential groom).*
- 3. Snape does not snatch Hermione away from the wedding or some other such rubbish.*
- 4. Snape is not to be turned into any of the following:*
 - Mr. Darcy*
 - A fluffy bunny*
 - A sap*

Notes:

- 1. Hermione's potential groom may be any other canon character.*
- 2. Any characters can be enlisted to help Severus in his endeavor.*

3. Genre up to the author. The story can be comedy, angst, drama, or any other combination the writer chooses.

4. Hermione does not have to end up marrying Snape.

5. All standard SH rules and submission policies apply.

Music drifted softly over the gathering, a soft upbeat melody that kept the atmosphere formal and sophisticated. Albus Dumbledore sat in the back row, shielded by a large bush of flowers hanging from the doorway to his left. His usual jolly smile was in place, and he was chatting to the lady next to him, who wore a large cumbersome hat. He sat on the Groom's side popping an assortment of lollies into his mouth, occasionally offering them to someone. The brilliant marquee tent housed the two sets of rows, the same bunches of white flowers and green leaves decorating each pew, leaving the petal-strewn aisle in between. At the end of the aisle stood the archway, vines and white flowers crawling all over it. Behind the archway, elevated, sat the string quartet, gaily playing their music while the crowd chatted quietly among themselves as they waited for the ceremony to begin. The groom stood next to his best man, no nerves showing whatsoever. The best man was straightening the groom's ceremonial marriage robes, black and white of course. His red hair stuck out in all directions, Weasley's hair defying gravity as usual.

"Looks like you're all set to go," he said to Harry.

"Yeah, looks like. Now if only she would hurry up," Harry said as he looked eagerly down the aisle, hoping to catch a glimpse of a bridesmaid.

"You know what, bro? Marriage is the best. Who would have thought it ay," Ron said as he gazed fondly at a black-haired woman in the second row cradling a young baby with shocking red hair. A goofy grin spread across Ron's face as he watched his wife and son.

Harry scanned the crowd. All the professors were there, excluding one in particular.

He couldn't even tear himself away from his research, he thought sadly to himself. Two years ago, Harry would have died of shock if he had thought for one minute that Snape would be at his wedding, and here he was wishing Snape were here. Two years ago, Harry was supposed to be dead, so the fact that Harry was having a wedding at all was cause for celebration.

Two years previously

"We're getting married!" Ginny exclaimed excitedly, proffering her diamond-studded hand for all to see. The Weasley clan gathered around to admire the ring as Ginny beamed up at Harry next to her, Harry looking equally happy.

"Good job, Harry, finally making an honest woman of her. Congratulations!" Fred and George said, punching Harry good-naturedly on the shoulder. Molly practically shoved the twins to the floor as she slammed into Harry and Ginny, hugging the life out of them with tears streaming from her eyes.

"I'm just so happy for both of you, and Harry, call me mum from now on, OK?"

"Mum...can't...breathe..." Ginny managed to squeak. Molly quickly let go, dabbed at her eyes, and bustled off to the kitchen to fix them all some tea, looking back fondly at her daughter and Harry every now and then. Arthur stepped up to Harry, clapped a hand on his shoulder, squeezing gently, welcoming him into the family.

"You've always been a part of this family, Harry, and now it'll be official. It's an honour to call you son," Arthur said as he leaned in and kissed Harry fondly on the forehead. Harry looked at his new family, finally content with his lot in life.

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"If you do that one more time, I swear..."

"You swear what, Miss Granger? If you insist on assisting me with this research, you will abide by my rules. Now, this potion is very unstable. Add in the ingredient a second too late, and I'll end up scraping you off the floor. Tell me, how do I know when to add in the moonstone?"

Hermione looked at her ex-professor exasperatedly. He would never relinquish power, not while he still lived. God forbid he let his guard down long enough.

"Well, Professor, in order to know when to add the next ingredient, you watch this particular potion for signs. It will give you an indication, such as a colour change, texture increase, or aroma or temperature change at a given stage. That is why you must watch this potion constantly in order to produce a nontoxic product." Hermione smiled smugly, knowing she had answered correctly. Snape sneered at her, rather maliciously, like he knew something she didn't.

"Well, Miss Granger, it seems you once again know everything. Congratulations. Very well, since you are so adept at this, please continue, unaided." Severus took a step back, giving over the work bench. He satisfied himself with leaning in the corner and observing.

Hermione worked studiously, taking note of each stage of the Stress Alleviator potion and adding in the relevant ingredients. The four stages of the potion passed within the hour, and after allowing it to simmer and then straining it, Hermione presented a flask for inspection. Severus studied the consistency through the flask, gave it a swirl with his finger, sniffed it, and then, taking a teaspoon, took a mouthful. A sour look flickered across his face before it settled back to his usual façade of disdain. Although in retrospect, it was a much more alleviated disdain.

"Very good, Miss Granger, that will be all for today," he said, putting the flask on the bench of the makeshift lab they had set up in the basement of Grimmauld place. Hermione rolled her eyes.

"Severus, I've told you time and again, call me Hermione," she said, beginning the clean up.

"And I've told you time and again that if you insist on addressing me, either use my title or Sir! The niceties of polite society may be wasted on the likes of Potter and Weasley, but I expected better from you, Miss Granger!" Hermione smiled, throwing Severus off. She was well used to his shock tactics, and they no longer worked on her.

"Ah Severus, it would all be well and fine if I were still your student at school and if we weren't fighting a war together and if I didn't consider you a friend. But I am not your student, we are fighting this war, and I do consider you somewhat of a friend. And as a friend, whether it be one-sided or not, I refuse to address you as a superior." Severus almost smiled at this. Almost.

"Fine. I concede. This time. We are finished here today. I have pressing business elsewhere. Good day." With a curt nod in her direction, Severus swept out of the basement, leaving Hermione smiling at her small victory.

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Present Day

"Wow, you look adorable! Oh my god, he is gonna blow his load when he sees you! I can't believe you get to wear this dress. Do you know how many people were in line for it? I mean... It's a Filipisco!" Parvati squealed as she fluffed around the bottom of Hermione's dress. It was indeed gorgeous. Handmade by Filipisco himself, the dress was figure hugging. It wrapped around her torso and fanned out softly at her waist, swirling down to the floor. The bodice was intricately woven in sparkling jewels and pearls, weaving a swirling pattern over and again. Down the back were no less than 50 hook pearl buttons holding the dress together, sparkling lazily in the morning light from the windows. The finishing touch Filipisco had made was to enchant his creation to shimmer with movement. The beauty of the dress was in its simplicity. There was no need for garish frills...it was enough to know that it was a Filipisco original.

Hermione's hair had been done by Parvati, who had charmed it into submission to fall in cascading curls down her back, the sides pulled together to meet at the nape of her neck with a beautiful flower and pearl clip. It helped that Parvati was the foremost leading hairdresser in the wizarding world. Hermione, for her part, just stared at the mirror. Parvati, in all her happiness, didn't notice the sadness that shadowed the bride's features. My special day. If only it were so. Plastering a smile on her face, Hermione stepped down from the pedestal she had been standing on. Parvati surveyed her critically, looking over every inch of the dress, hair, and make-up.

"Well, it's official, Hermione," she said in a saddened voice. Hermione, slightly alarmed, asked Parvati what was wrong. "You're perfect," she replied with a sly smile.

Hermione laughed in relief and playfully shoved Parvati on the arm. She looked thoughtfully at her bridesmaid as she busied herself tidying the room. Parvati looked almost as radiant as Hermione in the dark blue dress that Hermione had chosen for her bridesmaids. It complimented her perfectly. Parvati went over to a bag in the corner.

"I have something for you, 'Moine. It was my grandmother's, and I looked into the Muggle traditions of weddings, and it says you're supposed to have something old, something borrowed, and something blue. Well...this is all three," Parvati said as she placed a beautiful shimmering necklace around Hermione's neck. It was a smattering of blue pearls, three lines twisted together to form a choker, with a mesmerising sapphire gem in the middle to catch the eye. It completed the look perfectly. Hermione fingered it in the mirror, tears beginning to form, as she turned and hugged Parvati.

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Eighteen months previously

"This is war!" Severus shouted for the umpteenth time at Harry. Slamming down the piece of parchment he had been holding, Severus glared at Harry and stormed out of the room. The many eyes of the Order followed him as his dark robes swished around the corner.

Harry sank into a chair, casting daggers at the hem of Snape's robe. "He can't yell at me like that, not in my own house. I won't stand for it again."

"Harry, as much as it pains me to say this, mate, we need him."

Harry turned to look at Ron, who was studying the ground with intense scrutiny. "We need him? Since when?!" he shouted. He couldn't believe his best friend was siding with Snape, of all people!

Ron looked Harry squarely in the eyes this time. "Since he saved us, Harry. You and he might be blind to each others accomplishments, but it's obvious that without the both of you, we'd all be dead."

Harry lowered his eyes. "You're right." He sighed. "I know, I know, it's just when he gets around me, I get all... I dunno... riled up?"

Hermione smiled at this. Walking over to Harry, she laid a comforting hand on his shoulder. "Only because he knows your buttons, Harry. Come on, it's almost 4 am. Let's all get some sleep, huh? I'm sure Severus will be back tomorrow morning."

Harry smiled up at her and gently squeezed her hand. "Yes, bed sounds good." The members of the Order promptly gathered their bits of parchment together, Mrs Weasley poking her various progeny into submission up the stairs. Ginny lay curled in an armchair, asleep. Molly went to wake her but stopped as Harry laid a hand on her shoulder. She smiled knowingly and left the room, leaving Harry and Ginny behind.

Hermione went out to the back garden to find Severus pacing the length of the veranda. Judging by his body language, Hermione decided it was best to play it safe.

"Hey, Severus, you're going to wear out the floor boards one of these days," she said, taking a seat on the bench. He glared at her. She smiled in return.

"What do you want, Hermione? I'm trying to be angry here, and you're making it very difficult."

"Really? Never stopped you before," she said cheekily. Hermione reached out a hand towards Severus. He sighed, took her hand, and sat next to her, entwining his fingers in hers. They sat in silence, staring at the evening sky, Hermione's head resting on his shoulder.

"I'm getting too old for this. For fighting," Severus said, breaking the companionable silence.

"I know. I think everyone feels the same."

"If I... if we... survive... I'm going away. Come with me." The corners of Hermione's lips curled up into a small smile, allowing herself for a moment to hope for a future... any future. She squeezed his hand for reassurance, stood, kissed his forehead, and went back into the house, leaving Severus to the stars.

Harry sat on the edge of the armchair and smiled down at Ginny. He gently swept a wayward strand of hair from her face, trailing his hand across her head. Ginny responded in her sleep, her hand quickly snatching at Harry's and cuddling up to it readily. Harry laughed and gently shook her awake. Yawning and stretching, Ginny quickly looked around, noticed the empty room and panicked. It took her a moment to notice Harry by her side.

"Did I miss everything?" she asked, rubbing her eyes.

"I don't know, what do you remember last?" He asked her as he took her hand in his and pulled her up.

She toppled slightly and fell into his awaiting outstretched arms. She leaned against Harry, her head on his shoulder, and they made their way to the stairs.

"I seem to recall a lot of discussion over who gets to break into Death Eater houses... and... hey... you fought with Snape again, didn't you?"

"Maybe just a little. No need to worry, though. The old git will be back tomorrow morning, no doubt. Can't get rid of him that easily." They stopped on the third level outside a bedroom door. Harry turned to Ginny, taking her waist in his hands. Once again, he brushed hair out of her eyes.

"You looked adorable, you know, sleeping. Couldn't take my eyes off you." He kissed her forehead, and she moved closer to him, hugging him. After a moment, they parted. Ginny silently took Harry's hand and led him into their bedroom, the door closing softly behind them.

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Present Day

Parvati answered the knock at the door. A cowering house-elf held out a sealed envelope to her. She took it, and the creature promptly vanished. Puzzled, Parvati flipped the envelope over to find Hermione's name scrawled across it. "Hey Hermione, you have a letter. A house-elf just dropped it off," Parvati said, handing the envelope over to Hermione.

Hermione tore the wax seal off and emptied the contents into her hand. The only thing that fell out was a flower -- Alstroemeria. Silent tears fell down her face as she brought the fragrant blossom closer so she could take in its scent.

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Severus sat in the chair by the fire in his dungeon quarters. He stared at the fire broodily, occasionally gulping down the ever-filling glass of fire whiskey in his hand. The events of the last 48 hours played out in his mind over and over again. Glancing at the clock on the wall, he realised his messenger must have arrived. Time to try, one last time. Placing the glass gently on the table next to him, he cast the Floo powder into the fireplace and stepped into the emerald flames.

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One year previously

"This can't be the only way. I won't accept it. Find another way!" Ginny cried, tears falling down her face. She hugged Harry tightly.

"Gin, you know I can't... this is the only way. We have to take it," He said, holding her just as tightly. They stood like that for a while, just holding each other until Ginny could cry no more. Resolutely, Harry took her hand and led her into the once again-crowded dining room of Grimmauld Place. They sat at the table, and the talking died down. Everyone looked to Harry expectantly.

"We do this, and there is no going back. You all know that, right? If you want out, then now is the time," Harry said, making eye contact with every person at the table. No one stood to leave. No one blinked when Harry met their eyes. Harry smiled a triumphant yet sad smile, glad that no one's loyalty had wavered after all they had been through and would yet go through together and sad that he had to watch his friends... nay... family go through this one last time. He hated that everyone around him, everyone he touched with his life, found only misery and death.

Ginny's hand reached under the table and grasped Harry's. He squeezed back reassuringly, his fingers locating the ring around her finger and playing with it. Everyone was now muttering to their neighbours about the silent agreement they had all just reached.

Hermione leaned across to Harry. "We should start this after dinner. I think we'll all feel a little better with some food in our stomachs," she whispered.

"Careful, you're starting to sound like Molly." Harry grinned.

Hermione punched him on the arm and then rose from the table, stretching, her braided hair swinging side to side.

"I'm starving," she announced. Everyone agreed that food was much needed. Molly rose to go start dinner in the kitchen with the help of Fred and George. Tonks stopped talking to Remus long enough to realise what was happening.

"I'll help too, Molly!" she said enthusiastically, jumping up and heading towards the kitchen. On her way, she managed to knock over a chair, two glasses of water, and a rather cherished photo of Harry, Ron, and Hermione snowball fighting that was on a table. It smashed to the floor. She looked helplessly around, apologising profusely to Harry. Remus steadied her before she cut her fingers to shreds picking up the broken glass.

"*Reparo*," he said, waving his wand in the direction of the broken photo. The picture repaired itself, and Remus placed it back on the table. "See, its fine. Come on, let's go outside for a bit, shall we, and get some nice fresh air," said Remus, taking Tonks' hand and leading her towards the back garden.

Hermione looked to Severus with questioning eyes. He stood, and they both walked out to the back yard as well. Remus and Tonks sat on a bench over looking the garden, while Hermione and Severus were content to stroll by the flower beds, hand in hand.

"Hermione, you know why I'm doing this, don't you?"

"Severus, please, I don't want to discuss this again. You do what you have to. And I'll do the same."

At this, Severus looked at Hermione. Her hair was braided down her back, a style she had stuck with since leaving school. He studied her face. Her jaw was set, as though in defiance. "Hermione... what are you planning?" he asked suspiciously. Grabbing her by both arms suddenly and drawing her in roughly, he stared into her eyes. "Promise me you aren't going to do something stupid," he demanded, his eyes searching hers. Hermione looked away and wouldn't meet his gaze. He softened his grip, bringing a hand to her chin so that she was facing him. "Hermione," he whispered, almost pleading.

Meeting his gaze with soulful eyes, she finally gave him an answer. "I'll do what I have to do... as would you."

He nodded sadly. His hand, still on her face, drew her into a kiss. Not letting her hand go, he continued his walk with her around the backyard.

Severus stooped to pick a flower from the garden. Its beautiful pink petals were striped with black at the centre, and the petals changed hues. "Alstroemeria - it means devotion," he said, placing it gently in Hermione's hand, covering her hand with his own. Smiling weakly, Hermione stole a hungry kiss from him, wrapping her arms around his neck tightly, afraid that if she let go, he would be gone, stolen from her by some unseen foe.

"Hey, lovebirds! Dinner is ready!" Ron called from the back door.

He shuddered a little at seeing Hermione and Snape in their intimate embrace. Remembering how he had reacted when he found out they were together, he smiled a little. He had gone ballistic at them, hurling insults at each of them for days. He had finally realised that they suited each other perfectly when he couldn't convince them to break apart. He wondered how he could ever have thought he would be a good match for his best friend. With her brains, he would never have given her the challenges she needed. Neither Snape nor Hermione had changed, either. He thought Snape (no matter how much he tried, he couldn't say Severus) getting some would get him out of his permanently bad mood, but no, it seemed that it was just his personality after all.

With the end of the war closely approaching, Grimmauld Place was the safest place around and now also the most crowded. With the exception of a few key members, everyone lived there. Death Eaters had taken to roaming the streets, terrorising anyone they wanted, becoming a kind of wizarding police force, much like the Muggle Nazis of Germany. It had been reported that Voldemort was experimenting on Muggles and wizards alike, trying to determine what set wizards apart from Muggles. Rumour had it that he was trying to ascertain a certain gene or property that deemed if a person became magical or not and if it could be used to give people magical powers or, even worse, strip someone of them. The various raids orchestrated on the Death Eater homes by the Order had proved successful as they now had an idea of what Voldemort was planning and could plan against him. They could all feel it. The final battle was just around the corner.

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Present Day

Hermione had sent Parvati to go check that everything was ready so that she could have a moment to herself. It was all too much, this burden she carried. She felt if she saw him now, her resolve would fail, and she would willingly fall into his arms. So she sat, staring into nothingness, thinking of what could have been and holding the fragile flower in her hands.

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Six months previously

"Ginny, no!" Harry screamed. The dazzling green light from Lucius' wand hit Ginny in the back. Her eyes alighted on Harry for a brief moment before dimming, her body slumping to the ground. Harry, his fury unfathomable, hurled curse after curse at Lucius' sneering face. They all bounced harmlessly away, however.

The battle around them raged on, Dark against Light. Their worst fears had been realised. Voldemort had found the missing link between Muggle and wizard. Synthesising an elixir that allowed him mass mind control of hundreds of Muggle prisoners, Voldemort had turned them into his own army of magical puppets, awakening the dormant magic in them that wizards are naturally born with. Each Death Eater controlled a hundred more magical drones, the drones doing the bidding of their masters. It was a sad sight. The drones were prisoners of war, each emaciated body covered in little more than rags and filth. Their eyes were blank, their mouths hanging open with tendrils of drool escaping down the sides, disease ravaging each one. Not used to wielding such power, their bodies were deteriorating rapidly; used-up Muggle bodies littered the battlefield, dew gathering on them in the morning light.

A hundred emotions worked their way through Harry. He focused on them and turned them into his own power. It was time. Taking from his pocket a rounded, silver orb with a flattened bottom, he placed it on the palm of his wand hand. It leaked what looked like liquid silver, spreading through his fingers and fastening on the back of Harry's hand. Placing his wand in the centre of the orb, it absorbed the handle into its centre. The liquid silver worked its way up the wand, absorbing itself over the wand and solidifying. A soft glow enveloped Harry, and all the curses Malfoy tried to fling his way were absorbed into the glow and seemed to power it even more.

The most pure and beautiful thing in this place, and you killed her. For all eternity, you will be aware. You cannot move, breathe, speak, or touch. Just think. To think of the transgressions that you have allowed this day. I make you immortal, Lucius, and I put you in the ground." Harry released his throat and let Lucius fall to the ground, gasping and choking. Again his eyes gleamed silver, and a smile that seemed out of place spread across his face. A slashing movement of his wand and a flash of blue light severed the link Lucius was maintaining with his drones. They dropped to the ground of the Irish field, a few dying instantly, many just lying there, unable to comprehend what had passed. Muttering in Latin, Harry gestured his silver wand at Lucius, waving complicated patterns in the air. A thin golden haze spread from the wand tip and made its way to encompass the defeated man on his knees in front of Harry Potter. Lucius felt a cold power in him, strengthening his bones, his vital organs; everything within him became like steel. Harry's free hand began making signs as well. As the glow enveloped the regenerated Malfoy, a sparkling purple haze began leaking from his very pores and entering Harry's glowing shield.

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Severus withdrew from the Pensieve. It was true. Another prophecy that ruined his life. Perhaps not a perfect life, but it had certainly improved from the monotony he had known for the last 18-odd years. And now she was gone. Potter: the name that had tormented him for years. Then his spawn, whom he had hated at first, and then slowly, if grudgingly, come to respect, and rely upon. Now he had taken his most precious jewel. Severus stood abruptly and paced his quarters. He would not go down without a fight.

"Yeah, imagine that," Hermione replied, smiling sadly and taking a bite of toast.

"Uh... no... oh God, I think I'm gonna be sick!" Hermione rushed out of the room, the slamming of the bathroom door resounding through the quiet apartment.

Severus was pacing. This time, it was outside a dressmakers'. The lettering on the window proclaimed Filipsico creating stars since 1354 and housed two mannequins that modelled an array of dresses in the window. They walked down imaginary catwalks and winked at the wizarding folk passing by. Severus was in the heart of Diagon Alley and none too pleased, either. Crowds thronged to purchase their mundane items, jostling him here and there, ensuring a scowl was firmly in place. Hermione and Parvati exited the dress shop, a large box firmly under Parvati's arm. Weaving his way through the crowd, Severus quickly found his way to Hermione's side. Pulling her down an alley without Parvati noticing, he clamped a hand over her mouth before she could scream.

Pushing him back, she looked at him, confused for a moment, and then, shaking her head, she ran from the alley and back into the sun. Severus stayed in the shadows until his heart returned to normal, the pain a dull constant throb. It felt as though this one moment had taken years off his life. Exhausted, he Apparated to a small cottage in Ireland and slumped down on the couch. A house-elf promptly placed a glass of something black on the table and disappeared. Thoughtlessly swirling the black contents, he downed them in one go, contemplating stage two of his plan.

Hermione arrived at her apartment to get ready for the rehearsal dinner nice and relaxed. Upon entering her apartment, however, all the day's tension seemed to double in

her joints. There on the table where she had eaten breakfast sat a bouquet of roses as well as a small wrapped box. Taking the card from the roses she read it through, sat on the chair, and reread it.

"Just a reminder of

what you mean to me"

It was stamped with the seal of Harry Potter. Breathing a sigh of relief, she unwrapped the present. It was a beautiful gold and ruby pendant. "Always the Gryffindor" she chuckled softly as she put it on. Putting the roses in water, she went and changed into something semi-formal for the upcoming rehearsal dinner. It wasn't anything large; it was just to make sure everyone knew where to sit, and having a nice dinner with friends and family was always welcome. A knock at the door alerted her that her ride must have arrived. Grabbing her purse, she opened the door to find Severus standing there. He strode in and regarded her with a fierce gaze. Shaken but determined to have the last word this time, she stood her ground.

"Severus, you can't be here. Just go."

"You know this isn't right. You know I will never let go."

"I've made my choice, and it feels pretty right to me. Who are you to lecture me on the choices we make, anyway? Leave."

"I've made amends. Seen the error of my ways. Hermione, you are my way. How can he be yours?"

"Maybe he isn't mine, but at least it'll do the rest of the world some good. It's called sacrifice, Severus. You should know all about that. I have to go. I'm late. I'm sure you can see yourself out."

Hermione turned and walked out the door, leaving Severus standing there as though he were stupefied. He ran after her, shutting the door behind him. Grabbing her arm, he spun her around to face him, their bodies coming together for the second time that day. Catching his scent, her mind swam with all the memories it brought back Potions class, tutoring, research, strolls hand in hand, love making... for some reason she found it hard to breathe. Struggling, she pushed him away from her, wrenching her arm out of his grasp, and ran out the building, dragging in lungfuls of air and freedom. She leaned on the wall for a moment, shaking slightly. A hand touched her just where Severus had had his grip, and she jumped. Harry stood there, asking if she was all right.

"Oh, yes, just a bit winded is all. Let's go, shall we?" she replied casually, even if her voice was a little higher-pitched than normal. Harry led her to the waiting car, and Hermione cast a worried glance behind her before stepping inside. Severus watched, hidden in the shadows, as Potter led her to the car. He apparated back to his cottage.

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"I just love how you've set everything up, darling. Do you need any help with anything?"

"No, Mum, it's fine. Everything is taken care of. I just have to make sure the cake is going to be delivered, and then we're all done for the day. Go home and rest up for tomorrow, OK? I'll see you bright and early." Hermione kissed her mum goodbye as they left the gardens where the vows would take place. Her mum drove off, leaving Hermione alone in the car park. Occupied with the list of things to do in her hand, she didn't notice someone standing in front of her until she bumped into him. Apologising profusely, she backed up only to find it was Severus in front of her.

"God, Severus, when are you going to realise that we are not together any more? It's been a month already!"

"I know. You'd think you would have come to your senses by now. I want you, Hermione, and I know you want me. You don't love him."

Hermione looked at the ground and said quietly, "I do love him."

Severus stared at her, his anger a force that she could almost feel. "Look at me and tell me you love him and only him."

Hermione drew her eyes off the ground and walked over to Severus. She gazed into his eyes, focusing her dark brown ones on his unreadable black ones. "I, Hermione Granger, love Harry Potter and only Harry Potter. Happy?" she asked. Severus was devastated to find her voice hadn't wavered; her eyes had locked onto his, betraying nothing of a lie. Inside, he was crushed. Outside he remained, as always, unfathomable.

"You should have been an actress," Severus said almost fondly as he ran his fingers down the side of her face. Hermione moved her face away from them so that they couldn't touch her, not looking at him any longer.

"Leave, please," she whispered, barely able to get the words out. He sighed. Hermione heard a crack, and when she looked up, he was gone. Getting into her car, Hermione sat, staring at the steering wheel. Leaning forward, she let the sobs escape, finally breaking down and crying. Her body shook as she let out all her fury and frustration, her eyes stinging as the tears soaked her sleeves.

Severus Apparated outside of Hogwarts. He walked into the almost empty castle, the odd student scurrying away from him. Reaching his dungeons, he unwarded the door to find the Headmaster sitting comfortably at a table.

"Severus, you look absolutely haggard. Do sit down before you collapse, won't you? Toffee?" Dumbledore said as Severus strode past him to his desk. Snape shot him a withering look as he took up a quill and proceeded to mark the exams on his desk.

"Headmaster, while I appreciate your company as usual, I do have marking to do."

"It's been a month. It's time to let go."

Severus rose from his seat. As fast as a storm appears, Severus' demeanour had changed. His façade of mild agitation erupted into full-blown anger. He focused this rage on the man in front of him, the man he had trusted with his life for 18-odd years now. "I'll never let her go!" he shouted. "It's because of you, Albus, that we are not together! You and your fucking prophecies! Did you make it your life's mission to destroy me? Because you've done it!" Severus roared, red blotches appearing on his face. Throwing desks and chairs out of his way, he reached Albus and leaned in, whispering dangerously in his ear. "You wheedled your way in, Albus, and you tore her away, poisoned her mind, told her she was 'doing the right thing.' If it weren't for you, we'd be happy." Severus stood abruptly, turned, stormed out of the potions room, and went down to his quarters, slamming the door with the full force of his anger.

Going to his desk, he pulled out an envelope, his wax seal, and a jar. The jar could sustain any life held within it with a stasis charm. Inside floated a flower, as though on a gentle breeze. Severus unscrewed the top and took the flower out, placing it in the envelope and sealing it. The scent seemed to fill the room. Memories little more than dreams now brought forth feelings that he wished were long dead. Summoning a house-elf, he issued the last stage of his plan. He took a seat in front of the fire and took up the glass on the table, sipping at the fire whiskey and staring at the clock as it ticked away the time.

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Present Day

"I'll never stop loving you. You can't erase that, Hermione, no matter how hard you try," Severus said, breaking the tender silence. Tears streamed down Hermione's face as she kept her eyes on the floor. She couldn't bear to look at him any more; it hurt too much.

"Why now, Severus. I told you I'd do what I have to. You'd do the same," she whispered softly through the tears. These words brought Severus to her side, holding her

gently.

"Never. The one thing I'd never do is hurt you. You know that. It's not too late."

Hermione stood rigidly in his embrace. Finally she broke away, walking to the door. She paused, not daring to look at him, but spoke softly. "This is my choice, Severus. One life for many. My life will mean something this way. You have to see that." Dropping the flower, it floated down to the floor. She stepped on it as she left, leaving him in her ready room, the pink décor not quite matching the darkness that surrounded him. Heartache, anger, and loss emanated from him.

Walking down the hallway and out to the marquee tent, Hermione could hear cries of anguish, furniture breaking, a mirror smashing. Wiping the tears from her face, she met Parvati on the way, and together, they began the descent down the aisle, Hermione's father escorting her to the tune of a bridal waltz.

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