

Secrets

by whimbley

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Chapter 1 of 1

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A huge note of thanks to my Beta, June. I really couldn't have done it without her. It was her wonderful and thoughtful suggestions that made this story work. And thanks to ancientgirl as well, for jokingly suggesting the premise of this story. I think she was surprised I carried through with it. :)

Hermione crept silently into Severus's private potions lab. She looked nervously over her shoulder and let out a slow sigh. In the bedroom sleeping peacefully was her husband of two years, Severus Snape.

"Calm yourself, Hermione," she whispered to herself.

She struggled with her inner conscience. She knew what she was doing was for the best. She knew that eventually this time would come.

Harry had encouraged her in her decision. "You've given him two years, which is far more than the git deserves," Harry argued. "Surely he must trust you by now. I trust you to do the right thing." He had reluctantly aided in Snape's vindication after the final battle, but had never publicly endorsed the man's story.

Still, she didn't feel right about it. "It's for the best," she whispered to herself again and moved towards the lab table in the corner. She frowned at all the ingredients still spread out on the table. It wasn't like Severus to be so messy; his mental condition must be deteriorating. Just another reason why she needed to do what she was going to do, she decided. It was an act of mercy.

She moved aside a few beakers filled with various potions ingredients until she reached the container she was looking for. She reached into her robes and pulled out a concealed satchel. She opened it and quickly dumped the contents into the container, then stirred the mixture to blend the new and old.

A loud sound soon broke out. She banished the satchel evidence of her crime and covered the container. She cringed and listened for Severus's footsteps, but all she could hear was his loud snoring coming from their bedroom. She drew a shaky breath and sighed. She hoped Severus wouldn't discover the difference.

Suddenly, she felt a hand touch her back. Hermione gasped and turned around.

"Why so upset, my dear?" asked Severus, his voice still deep with sleep.

"Oh, Severus, you startled me," said Hermione, shaking.

"That I can see," he said, narrowing his eyes at her. "What were you doing up so early in the lab?"

"I was just in to check on the potion," she said nervously. "You were up so late working on it. I thought I'd better check on things. And I was right. Severus Snape, I've never seen you leave the lab such a mess," she scolded.

He smiled gently down at her and kissed her forehead.

"I know, I know," he said. "I'll clean it up later. You know as well as I do how important this potion is. I simply didn't wish to stop working on it until the last possible moment. It won't be long now before it's done. And then I'll begin my clean-up."

"Very well," said Hermione, trying to sound miffed and not anxious. "Is there anything I can get you in the meantime?" she asked innocently.

"No, no, dear. Not until I've had my first cup of coffee. You know as well as I do that I'm nothing without it," he said sleepily.

"Yes, yes, I do know," said Hermione looking away nervously. "I'm off to get dressed then," she said quietly.

Severus just grunted in her direction as he struggled with his coffeemaker, measuring out just the right amount of coffee grounds for his black cup of gold.

He listened as Hermione wandered off to tend to herself. There certainly had been something the matter with his young wife. He'd learned much about her during their last two years together, and if there was one thing he knew it was that she was never up before he was. His shrewd eyes scanned the lab for anything out of order, but he could find nothing.

The delicious smell of coffee wafted over him, and he turned to see if it was ready.

'Ahhh,' he thought as he saw it was done. 'Lovely.'

He poured himself a large dark cup and sipped it slowly. Severus closed his eyes and allowed the life-saving liquid to fill his veins *Such sweet decadence,* he thought to himself.

When he was done with his coffee, he would think more about what Hermione could have done. While he didn't like to be distrustful of his wife, he couldn't help suspect that there was more to it than this. He'd been a spy for far too long to trust anyone completely not even his wife.

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Severus struggled while teaching his third year class. He thought back to the previous weekend at her parents' house. They had all humored Hermione by watching one of her favorite Muggle TV shows, in which some man in a red shirt got killed while the others wearing gold or green shirts lived. "You'd look good in a red shirt," she'd said smilingly. "You know, with your dark hair and coloring. I think I'll buy you a red shirt or jumper."

Then they'd watched another episode, in which another man in a red shirt got killed. And then another episode, with another dead man in a red shirt. The saps never saw what was coming. Severus realized that red was not good, and that was the color she wanted him to wear. But that hadn't been enough to arouse his suspicions, especially after they stopped watching red shirts get killed and started watching the Cardassian spy Garak lie, con, kill, and manipulate his way on Deep Space Nine; now he was a consummate Slytherin!

Today, Severus's suspicions were fully aroused. He wasn't sure what was wrong with him, but he knew something wasn't right. He was sweating and he felt a bit a nauseous. The students were making a simple potion, nothing that should produce dangerous fumes, so there had to be another reason for his symptoms. It had been almost a month since he had caught Hermione in his lab she who never got up earlier than him and things just hadn't been the same since then. He'd noticed the changing in his body gradually. A general feeling of malaise had first overtaken him, followed by the more severe results. The shaking, nausea and headaches were only getting worse. He'd tried every known spell to reveal what poison could be doing this to him but to no avail. He had even begun turning away his meals at the staff table.

That is, until he brought Dobby to tears upon refusing a special meal the elf had prepared just to please the finicky Potions master. Hermione had berated him about that, and he had acquiesced to eating it, more to shut her up than anything. He would curse them all if he heard one more time how Dobby had worked himself to near death to make something to appeal to him. "He's just concerned that you might die of starvation," Hermione said protectively.

He had to admit to himself that the food Dobby had made was very good; after all, the elf had worked for the Malfoys for decades, and Lucius would never tolerate substandard fare. Severus had gone back to regular meals after that argument, but not because Hermione had asked him to; rather, because he saw no relation between his condition and the elf-made food he was consuming. Besides, Hogwarts house-elves were bound to serve the staff; not even Dobby a free elf could circumvent that.

Sadly, the evidence seemed to be pointing at his lovely wife Hermione. Just yesterday morning, he'd been drinking his coffee when he walked into the bathroom and found her getting dressed and listening to music on her Muggle headset. After she'd finished applying her lipstick, she started singing: "It's just the way that it is here. And you say... I never thought it could. Bella donna... we fight..." She noticed him and stopped singing. "Did you want something, Severus?"

"No," he'd said tonelessly. *'Belladonna? Why not something colorless and tasteless?'* he'd thought. Just in case, he made a fresh batch of antidote to belladonna deadly nightshade. It never hurt to be careful.

That night, she had prepared a meal "with my own hands," she'd said. The fresh berry trifle looked perfect, but she had not eaten any. "Just for you," she had said, "since you don't need to lose weight and I do."

He had eaten it, confident in the strength of his belladonna antidote. He had tasted the trifle carefully sweet berries. "Blackberries," she'd called them. Hah! He'd even had a second helping, along with his coffee. But she'd looked him in the eyes when she served him the trifle, and he could sense no guile in her. Could she be innocent?

Severus sighed. How he hated not trusting his wife. There were few people Severus had ever trusted implicitly. One had been the late Albus Dumbledore and the other, until recently, had been his wife. His young, beautiful, Gryffindor wife, who couldn't tell a lie to his face.

'My wife,' he thought as the students continued to work on their potions. She had been acting peculiar lately. Several times he'd caught her eyeing him suspiciously. She'd even seemed concerned when he said he wasn't feeling well, but she'd not looked him in the eyes when she asked that.

'The little harpy,' he thought. Only she could do this to him. She knew all of his weaknesses.

Severus was startled out of his reverie by the shouting of one of his students.

"Wha...?" he mumbled sleepily.

"Professor! I said, Jackie McPhee's cauldron is on fire!!!"

Severus jumped from his seat and raced to put out the fire. With one quick incantation the fire was out, and the students resumed their work, but Severus felt his heart racing. What had he been doing? He must have started drifting off, lost in his thoughts. He frowned. That was another thing he'd noticed. He wasn't nearly as cognitive as usual and found himself falling asleep in the most unusual places.

Just last Wednesday he'd somehow managed to nod off in the staff room. He'd woken up to the sound of Flitwick giggling with Minerva. His head was face down on the staff table, his afternoon coffee and scone untouched, with drool in a puddle under his cheek.

"That young wife of yours keeping you up, Severus?" laughed Madame Hooch.

Severus had been horrified at that display of weakness in front of his peers. And Hooch's comment on his personal life left him tempted to turn the whole lot of them into Blast-Ended Skrewts.

Severus scowled and dismissed his class, gathering his things up as he retreated to his personal lab for a cup of his favorite Dragon Brew coffee. He needed to wake up and get his senses about him again.

He poured himself a large cup. Hermione had been on him lately to cut back on his coffee consumption and drink other beverages "nutritious juices from a health-foods store," she claimed. Beverages that smelled and came in strange colors that could hide any number of poisons and mind-altering ingredients.

Nag, nag, nag about "caffeine this, and remember what the healer said that." Now when he drank a cup of coffee, all he could think of was her nagging; still, he enjoyed the taste of his Dragon Brew.

Suddenly, he heard a sound coming from their personal quarters. Severus pulled his wand from his sleeve and crept quietly in. A horrible retching sound was coming from the bathroom.

"Hermione?" he called out.

"In here," came her miserable cry.

Severus walked in and saw his wife sitting on the floor before the toilet.

"What's wrong with you?" he asked.

"The flu," she croaked before returning to her retching.

"The flu?" he said, grimacing at his ill wife on the floor.

"Yes. Poppy says the whole school is coming down with it."

"Oh," he said, taking a large step away from her. "Is there anything I can do for you?" he asked, sincerely hoping she would say no.

"No," she gasped. "I just need some rest."

'Good,' thought Severus. Normally, he would have been more solicitous of a sick wife, but not when he suspected she was trying to kill him. "If you are certain then, I shall be returning to my lab."

"Yes, thank you, Severus," she said weakly and returned to her retching.

Severus walked quickly away and returned to his lab scrubbing his hands at the sink, trying to wash away any flu germs Hermione could have spread to him in that short time.

'Well, that did make sense,' he thought. It was possible then that the symptoms he was feeling were simply those of the flu. If his young, pretty wife had come down with it and Poppy said the whole school was coming down with it, then it was likely he was too. He would have a word with Poppy soon and seek out a remedy, because the school nurse would need him to make cauldrons of it for the students. He didn't mind the extra work, if it meant his wife was not trying to kill him.

Two days later, Severus felt defeated as he leaned over the bucket in his laboratory. He'd never felt so horrid. And that headache of his wasn't making things better.

He'd like to curse the person who had brought this blasted flu into his classroom. He finished his retching and slowly got off his knees. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and whispered hoarsely, "Evanescio," and watched what had recently been his breakfast disappear.

But come to think of it, he hadn't noticed any of his students absent of late. He reached for a vial of headache potion as well as an anti-nausea elixir and tried to again shake away the feelings of suspicion against Hermione. Poppy couldn't be part of his wife's plan, could she? Surely, the nurse wasn't lying when she told Severus she already had enough potions to handle the flu epidemic. He thought back to their conversation: Poppy had been busy folding bedsheets when she'd spoken to him; she didn't look him in the eyes, and the infirmary was empty of patients...

He almost tripped over Hermione's headset. 'What is this doing here? Why would she be in my lab?' he wondered. On a hunch, he pressed the "play" button to hear the music she liked so much. "And you, you got in my way, stood between me and my friends. It was my sin, it was my shame. You were unconscious to the pain I was in. I hear there's trouble in Shangri-La..."

He switched to the next song. "In the beginning I believed in love and things. It happened like a hurricane. I could never really tell you what this did to me. I could never make it better for you."

He turned it off. Hermione had always been outspoken and unafraid to speak her mind; if she felt that way, she would have said something to him not poisoned him.

He quickly washed the headache potion down with the elixir and headed for the staff room, all flu symptoms now gone. He was eager to get a cup of coffee there, as his usual Dragon Brew wasn't tasting quite up to par. It could be the result of the flu affecting his sense of taste, or maybe the coffee wasn't freshly ground. Perhaps the elves had something better stocked there.

He had just reached the door to the staff room when he heard a discussion coming from inside. Severus sneered as he heard the voice of Harry Potter.

"And you're saying Snape doesn't even know she switched it?" asked Harry.

"Not a clue," said Lupin. "She made the switch a month ago."

"Even though he's an expert Potions master and can smell and taste a glass of wine, then tell you whether it was aged in a stainless steel tank or wooden barrel?"

"That's right. That's Severus."

Harry laughed. "That's our Hermione. If anyone could fool Snape it's her."

Severus had heard enough. He swirled around and stormed off in the direction of their personal quarters.

So he had been right. The woman had made a fool of him. He would never trust anyone again. He whipped out his wand along the way, startling a group of fourth years with his ferocity.

Several of the Hogwarts portraits followed him, running from frame to frame gossiping about the enraged Potions master. He could hear their excited whispers as he sped

along his way, his anger growing with every step.

So his dear wife had been poisoning him. And Potter and Lupin had been on to it. He wondered just what exactly she had been doing to him and what they were up to.

A sudden thought hit him, and he realized that it was his coffee which had been tasting differently. There'd been no flu epidemic!

"Bloody hell," he cursed out loud, frightening even more students scrambling out of his way. "It was the coffee!" he shouted to nobody in particular.

He increased his strides with more vigor, now changing his route and heading to his laboratory. No wonder things had been going so wrong. A number of horrible reasons for his wife's betrayal began racing through his head.

He reached the door and raced to the coffee container on the shelf. He grabbed it and swirled about to the private entrance of their personal quarters. Had he not been in quite such a state, he would have noticed the voices coming from inside.

He blasted his way through the door and stared into the eyes of his traitorous wife.

"It was the coffee!" he yelled as he threw the entire contents of the container into the air at her.

Suddenly, flashes from cameras blinked all around him, a band began to play and confetti began to rain down with the ground coffee.

Severus blinked and looked at his wife, standing with a shocked look on her face.

The room was full of their friends and other staff members from Hogwarts. Minerva was standing just inside with a glass of champagne in her hand, and Madam Hooch was standing next to her. Just then, Potter and Lupin hurried through the door.

"Ah, we missed it," said Harry.

"What in the blazes is going on here?" yelled Severus.

Everyone stared at him silently. Hermione cautiously moved closer to him.

"Severus," she said carefully to him. "This is the team from the Dragon Brew Switch Challenge and a few representatives from the Daily Prophet." She gestured to the strangers behind her.

He looked at her as if she had grown a sixth head.

"The Dragon Brew Switch Challenge," she enunciated carefully. "It's the one where you switch a loved one's regular coffee with decaf for a month and then see if they noticed the switch."

Severus continued staring.

"The one where you win an all-expenses paid trip to Tahiti, if you agree that there was no difference in the taste." She emphasized the last five words, staring meaningfully into his eyes.

"So tell us, Professor Snape," said a rather portly woman who appeared to be a representative from the Dragon Brew Coffee Company. "Did you notice the switch?"

A sense of anticipation hung in the air as everyone in the room waited to see what the famed Potions master would say. Every Hogwarts student for more than twenty years knew of his skills.

Severus looked deeply into his wife's eyes and felt the adrenaline coursing through his veins.

He lowered his wand and opened his mouth to speak.

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Severus looked down at the colorful floral outfit he was wearing. What a ridiculous outfit to have to wear. And for what? For answering a stupid question about a coffee challenge.

He grumbled quietly to himself.

"What was that, sir?" asked a man clad in white, standing to his right

"What?" asked Severus.

"I was asking you if you would like another Pina Colada or would like to try our Tahiti special?" asked the waiter.

"I think I'll stick with the Pina Colada," said Severus. He loved fresh pineapple, and the server was smart enough to give him extra pineapple wedges.

"And the lady?" asked their server.

"Oh, I'm fine with my water. Thank you," Hermione told the server, who then left. "Severus, isn't this wonderful?" she asked as she stretched out luxuriously on her chaise lounge.

"I have to admit, that although it was one of your more harebrained ideas, the end result is rather nice," said Severus, reaching across the distance to hold her hand.

"Oh, Severus, how many times can I say that I'm sorry. I never once thought you would think I was poisoning you. You know as well as I do what the Healer said at your last appointment. You were drinking way too much coffee," she said.

"Yes, I suppose allowing me to go through caffeine withdrawal while the entire school was watching was a much better idea," he quirked, lifting an eyebrow at her.

"Severus," she said tenderly, looking into his eyes. "I am so very sorry... again."

Severus laughed. "That will do, my dear, that will do," he said, kissing her hand. "Now how did I ever let you talk me into wearing these ridiculous shorts?"

"They're called swim trunks. And I happen to think they look lovely on you," she said, smiling. "And besides, you know there is another reason why I wanted you to stop drinking that coffee and get you away to Tahiti?"

Severus looked at her, puzzled again.

"Another reason? I thought we were through with secrets," he said, frowning.

"Well, there is just one more secret to reveal," she said quietly, while looking into his eyes lovingly. "Severus, I'm pregnant."

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Seven months later, Severus still needed no caffeine. Instead, he had a new infant daughter, who with just one squeak could instantaneously wake him up... every two hours. His mind said he was exhausted, but his heart was invigorated by the presence of another person in his life to love. Heart over mind won every time.

A/N:

This was written for the SS/HG Exchange for Regann, the author of "Heart Over Mind," a wonderful SS/HG romance which she recently completed.

Her second prompt for this exchange fic was: "Hermione has a secret she needs to reveal. Emphasis on romance, light drama, utter sap." Her first prompt was: "Life being lived in the ordinary moments" which I think includes coffee.

Star Trek red shirts from one of Regann's favorite shows.

Garak from Star Trek: Deep Space Nine another of her favorite shows.

Stevie Nicks is Regann's musical idol, hence the lyrics from "Bella Donna," "Trouble In Shangri-La," and "Some Become Strangers."

Regann also likes Stargate Atlantis, so Severus and Hermione might have gone to Atlantis instead of Tahiti, except that Tahiti had the fresh pineapple.