

Potential

by ubiquirk

Family obligations can be a pain in the arse, and they've landed an increasingly bitter and sarcastic Hermione an unrewarding job in the Muggle world. Just who can incite her to save herself? Why, someone even snarkier, that's who.

(one shot)

Chapter 1 of 1

Family obligations can be a pain in the arse, and they've landed an increasingly bitter and sarcastic Hermione an unrewarding job in the Muggle world. Just who can incite her to save herself? Why, someone even snarkier, that's who.

Written for the SSHG Exchange for Ferporcel based on her prompt: The war is over; life goes on. Hermione finds herself living a life she doesn't like and is unhappy (reasons are up to the writer) until she finds a person she thought dead: Severus Snape.

Disclaimer: Not mine. No money.

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oOoOoOo

Thursday

"Dad." I realize I'm not holding down the correct button on the speakerphone, so I push another and try again. "Dad, Mr Haygood is here for his three o'clock. Are you ready for him?"

"Yes, dear. Get him settled in room two, and I'll be there in a jiff."

Making sure to internalise my sigh, I turn a bright smile on the man standing across the desk. Sometimes I feel less a business manager and more a walking poster ad for the new standard of English cosmetic dentistry.

His return smile reminds me of why that may not be such a bad thing.

"Right this way, Mr Haygood."

He follows me to the small examination room with its vinyl-covered chair that still faintly resembles a medieval torture rack. The intense spotlight over its head and the various tools lined on a nearby cart do little to dispel this notion.

Once he's settled in, I blast another overly done smile and chirp, "Dr Granger will be with you shortly." I can't leave the room fast enough.

Why, oh, why, did Maggie have to have a holiday? I'm beginning to rethink my entire stance on workers' rights.

I lack any of the skills necessary to be a receptionist. I'm not good with people, I hate being cheery, and most of the time these days I can't be arsed about either of these two things.

Besides, if I were able to go into my office instead of having to 'woman' this desk, I could get caught up on the supply ordering. I snort. Who would ever have imagined that all of my skills in Arithmancy would be wasted on determining how many disposable latex gloves to order?

But then, who would have imagined that Dad would fall completely apart when Mum died?

This respected professional, who couldn't coordinate a tea party for dolls, pops his head around the corner. "Hermione."

"Yes, Dad?"

"Don't forget that my three-thirty is a new patient. You'll have to make sure Mr Smith fills out all of the paperwork before I can see him. Maggie usually keeps the packets ... erm ... somewhere."

"Of course, Dad."

Once he disappears, I sigh. I love him dearly, but he couldn't find his own arse using a state-of-the-art GPS tracking system.

I scan the workstation.

Now where would I keep new-patient paperwork?

Deciding that the bottom-left desk drawer is the most logical location, I open it. It contains Maggie's home-away-from-home items: a sweets stash, fuzzy jumper, and the last three issues of *Cosmopolitan*, the top copy of which asks in lurid pink lettering, "You Can Get Your Man, But Can You Get Him To Go Down?"

I snort.

Not bloody likely. But then I'd have to 'get my man' in the first place.

Slamming the drawer closed in frustration, I take another look around the cramped space.

Right. Now, if I were an idiot, where would I keep new-patient paperwork?

The ancient filing cabinet mocks me once my eyes stop flickering past it in an attempt to deny its existence. We have an ongoing battle for dominance that it continuously wins, much to my consternation.

I approach hesitantly. Current patient files are in the top three drawers, leaving the bottom one an unknown entity.

Getting down on my knees, I give the handle a gentle tug to signal honourably that I'm ready to skirmish.

It doesn't budge.

Settling into a crouch instead, I use the strength of my legs to try again.

Nichts. Nada. Nothing.

Shite. Why did I leave my wand in my office?

I decide to give it one last try before conceding non-magical defeat. This time I stand completely bent over, bracing one foot forward, one back, and waving my arse in the air.

The ensuing struggle is punctuated by the occasional "crap!" or "bloody hell!" set against a background of the continuous squeal of protesting metal.

That must be why I'm not aware that someone's entered the waiting room until the person's loud throat clearing penetrates. The English, after all, often use politeness to thinly veil their impatience with and contempt for others.

Straightening, I call out, "I'll be with you in a moment." I keep my back towards the annoying git and pretend to sort some papers on top of the cabinet in order give my face time to lose the red colour I can feel burning there. I've probably just undone a week's worth of work for Maggie, but I can't find myself feeling too badly about it. Stupid cow deserves some grief for putting me through this nightmare whilst she romps on the beaches of Majorca.

Somewhat composed, I turn to face the new patient.

Mr Smith? How bloody original!

Before me stands one Severus Snape looking shocked, or at least what I assume is shocked for him. His eyes are a little more widely open than usual, and he's not sneering.

And if he looks shocked, I must look like a raving loon with my jaw dropped open.

"Miss Granger "

That appellation snaps me back to myself. "That's Ms."

He looks startled enough to be derailed from his train of thought. "What?"

"I said, it's Ms now. I'm no longer twelve."

"Yes, well." The line between his brows deepens and his lips purse slightly. He's uncomfortable.

I love it.

Unfortunately, he soon recovers his sneer. "Ms Granger," he dwells on the zed sound, extending it out into an irritating buzz, "if you would be so good as to explain why I find you here?"

"Me explain? How about you explain? You're the one who's supposed to be dead!"

"Yes, well ..."

"Well, what? I saw you fall! Lucius Malfoy threw an *Avada Kedavra* at you and then turned around and did the same to Ron."

"Perhaps you should consider seeking employment with an ophthalmologist instead of a dentist, Ms Granger. I specifically fell before Lucius's curse reached me."

"But ... but how? No one's that quick. It would have hit you about the time you saw the flash of green light or heard his voice."

"I have been unintentionally imprecise in using the term 'fall' since I did not actually fall, per se." He pauses and watches me thoughtfully for a moment. "I had placed a charm on Lucius's wand that was set to throw me to the ground as soon as it detected him channelling the Killing Curse towards my person."

"But, but ..."

"The Killing Curse is unblockable, Ms Granger, not, in theory, undodgeable. I simply deduced a way to dodge."

"Simply." I snort.

"I see that you have at least obtained the ability to detect sarcasm, Ms Granger. Congratulations. It is more than most Gryffindors manage." His sneer fades to be followed by a less defined expression. "I had ..." This throat clear sounds nervous. "I had quite a bit of time on my hands that last year before the Final Battle. It seemed a prudent use of it."

"And why Malfoy, or did you place the charm on multiple wands?"

"The charm is much too draining for such an endeavour. No, it was because Lucius was always such a clever bastard. I determined that if any Death Eater were going to deduce my true allegiance, it would be him."

"And so you 'fell' down."

"Yes."

"And stayed down." Ron's face floats before my mind's eye, and my heart starts to race as my voice rises. "Did you not think that we might have needed you? That you could have made a difference? That people died whilst you laid there?"

His voice turns cold once again. I can almost hear the creak of protesting vertebrae as his back and shoulders stiffen. "You must really look into procuring a more adequate lexical reference text, Ms Granger. Just because I 'fell' down does not indicate that I merely 'laid' there. Just who do you think slew Nagini?"

"That was "

"Indeed, it was."

He remains silent as I sort through this new information. Harry'd been dodging Nagini's fangs whilst trying to deflect bolts from Voldemort for over ten minutes when suddenly a shaft of green light had raced across the ground to strike the snake. A temporarily distracted Voldemort was all the opportunity Harry had needed. It had all been over within seconds.

When I meet his eyes, he quirks an eyebrow at me.

I gush, "If not for you "

"I highly doubt Potter would have succeeded without your rapid dispatch of Lucius." A curious expression crosses his face one I've never seen from him. Similarly, a faintly hesitant note enters his voice. "You showed such potential that day, Ms Granger. You were ... formidable."

Praise from Snape of all people!

I can feel my mouth gape open, and I know I appear gobsmacked again.

Looking at him, really looking at him for the first time in years, I see a human being instead of a caricature. The pinched expression he always wore at Hogwarts was one I had long interpreted as disdain. Seeing it again through more mature eyes, I'm beginning to wonder if it isn't bitter unhappiness.

He stirs uncomfortably, and I realize I've been staring. Collecting myself, I ask, "So, you're alive. But why are you here in this office?"

Sneer now firmly in place, his voice takes on the derisive tone familiar to me. "I had heard that the smartest witch of her age gave daily floor shows involving large items of furniture."

I merely stare at him.

"Would you believe that I had tracked you here to see if the rumours of your overwhelming lack of success were true?"

My jaw begins to clench, but I try to keep my expression neutral as I continue to watch him.

After holding my gaze for several long, awkward moments, his eyes dart quickly to the left and then down before slowly rising to meet mine. "Some of us, Ms Granger, are willing to expend the effort to better ourselves."

"What?" It comes out as a high-pitched squeak that even I cringe at.

He sighs and pinches the bridge of his nose. "My teeth require attention, Ms Granger. This practice was recommended to me."

I stare at him. His face appears exactly the same pale and marked by lines of care instead of age. The hair is marginally less greasy yet still limp. His clothing is Muggle, but still severe of cut and black of colour.

This is him trying to improve his appearance?

My perusal makes him shift his weight slightly, and he adds, "I am here to have my teeth bleached."

"Bleached."

"Yes, bleached." His sneer is back, displaying the rather yellow teeth in question. "Are you hard of hearing as well? It appears as if you need almost every type of medical attention but dentistry, Ms Granger."

I ignore his jibe and decide to ask the obvious question. "And you're using a Muggle method because ..."

Instead of answering, he quickly asks, "Why are you here, Ms Granger?"

"I work here."

"Yes, but why this particular venue? You had no cause to leave the Wizarding world."

Ah, so you did.

"It's my father's practice."

"Your father but the name is Worthington Dentistry ..."

"Dr Worthington took Mum and Dad on as junior partners a few years before he retired. It gave them an established practice, so they kept the name."

"And your mother?"

It's my turn to look away for a bit before facing him squarely again. "She died a little over a year ago."

"I see."

I want to scream at him that, no, he does not see. That no one sees. That I'm wasting away in this bright yellow office with nothing for *me*.

When I look back up at him, the strangest look is on his face. If he were anyone else, I'd think it empathy. On him, I'm not completely certain.

Perhaps he does see.

"Hermione, love," Dad's voice cuts in, "would you tot up Mr Haygood's bill for him? There's a dear."

"Yes, Dad." My voice maintains the saccharine cheerfulness I typically use at the office.

As I turn back to the front, I see Snape smirk.

"Oh, and is this Mr Smith?" Dad continues. "All done with the paperwork then?"

"Not yet, Dad. Did you remember where Maggie keeps the packets?"

"Well," he dithers, "they must be here somewhere." He's wearing the faintly befuddled expression I've come to know all too well this past year the one I can't ever recall seeing during my childhood.

Running a nervous hand over his head, he paces the tiny space behind me before stopping and smiling beatifically. "I've sussed it out!" he cries, suddenly bending over and tugging open the second drawer of the filing cabinet. "No, no. Not there," he says rather distractedly, throwing an embarrassed grin over his shoulder. He runs his hand over his head again, then stoops to grasp the handle of the bottom drawer a drawer that opens without protest, mind.

He hands me a packet and goes to shut the infernal contraption.

"Wait, Dad." I do a quick calculation based on the look I had at the schedule this morning. "Could you hand me five more? I might as well get them ready for the other new patients."

"Good thinking, my dear. But then you always were a smart one."

A smart one?

I look over to see Snape watching me, smirk firmly in place, eyebrow raised in questioning amusement.

I hand him a Biro and the new-patient packet on a clipboard. "Here you are, Mr Smith," I chirp. "For small errors, just cross them out. If it's something larger, I have Tippex you can borrow."

As he moves to a chair, Mr Haygood takes his place at the counter, and my father retreats to his office.

Finalizing patient paperwork is unfamiliar enough to require my attention and dull enough that I regret such mental expenditure.

"Yes, now sign here and here." I point to the relevant areas, both of which happen to be labelled with 'Patient's Signature' in bold type.

How thick can he be? He's been coming here for over ten years, and Maggie told me the forms have been the same for the last five of those!

Flashing me a sheepish smile, Mr Haygood signs, accepts his copy from me, and makes a hasty retreat out the door after turning to find Snape standing right behind him.

"Well, that is certainly the most stimulating mental exercise I have witnessed in quite some time."

Glaring, I refuse to dignify that statement with a response.

"And I ask you again, Ms Granger, why are you here?"

"I told you," I make no attempt to hide my annoyance, "it's my father's practice!"

"Which tells me why he is here, but not why you have lowered yourself to such a ... a Muggle existence."

"So you believed Voldemort's pure-blood ideology!" My heart pounds rapidly as I feel my stomach give a nervous clench.

Damn, I've gone soft, leaving my wand in my office!

"Don't be ridiculous this has nothing to do with blood. I am speaking of potential!" His voice conveys a great deal of anger, but he keeps his volume regulated. "You were the best student to come through Hogwarts for over a generation, and you do nothing less than nothing with that ability!"

Less than nothing.

I'll give him less than nothing!

Just as I open my mouth to reply, Dad's voice calls from behind me, "All sorted, are you? I'll just take a look at what you've put down on the forms then."

Reaching a hand towards Snape, I wait. When he stands there staring yet unmoving, I make sure my glare belies my saccharine tone of voice and chirp, "Perhaps I'm not the only person who needs an ear exam."

He merely raises an eyebrow.

"Your paperwork, Mr Smith?"

Handing across the clipboard, his expression is again guarded.

I shuffle through the forms and hand Dad the pages concerning desired treatment and dental history.

As if he has any dental history, the snaggle-toothed git.

"Well, then, if you'll just get Mr Smith settled in room one, I'll be with him in a jiff."

"Certainly, Dad. Mr Smith, if you'll follow me?"

Turning abruptly, I really don't care whether he's following me or not as I walk quickly down the hall and enter the examination room.

Maybe Dad will find an abscessed tooth, and Snape will need a root canal a long, painful root canal. Or three. All with complications.

When I turn, he's standing in the doorway, face neutral. "Ms Granger, if you will allow me "

"No, I won't allow you anything. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have some pointless work to do."

I'm able to maintain my righteous indignation all the way back to the receptionist's desk, where I settle in even though there are no more patients today.

In a few moments, I hear Dad enter the examination room, say a few words to Snape, and shut the door.

Sighing, I allow my shoulders to slump.

Bastard, bastard, bastard!

Who's perfectly correct. Because if someone had asked me two years ago what I was going to be doing today, I would never in a thousand suppositions have put forward office manager. Not that there's anything wrong with it, if I'm honest with myself it's simply the not right for me.

And it stings oh, how it stings! to have someone such as him point it out, someone whose opinion always counted, no matter how much I didn't want it to.

Wet plops sound as tears hit the paperwork lying in front of me. I shove it aside.

It feels as if something struggles to burst in my chest a tightness I've too long ignored, making my breaths come in hitching gasps. Fluid continues to run down and my face and into my open mouth a salty reinforcement of my distress. I lay my head upon my arms, really sobbing for what seems the first time in years since well before Mum died, at least.

Mum! Oh, Mum, how I miss you! Dad well, he just fell apart ... and I couldn't ... and I miss you so...

The tightness uncoils, spiralling out through the mewling sounds of my mouth, the liquid sorrow of my tears.

At indeterminable time later, my crying subsides enough that I can take in air more evenly, can think a bit more clearly.

And who is this person I've become? This bitter, sarcastic person who's just like ... just like Snape! I never wanted to be this person!

I won't be. Not anymore.

Sitting up, I wipe at my cheeks, reaching for a tissue to blow my nose.

And none too soon I can hear the whine of the tooth polisher. Dad's almost finished with Snape.

Retrieving my wand from my office, I enter the small lavatory and wince at my reflection. Even though I disparaged it at the time, I'm now grateful for Parvati and Lavender's constant nattering about beauty charms A few deft flicks dispel the puffy redness of eyes and nose.

By the time the two men emerge from examination room one, I'm once more seated behind a dry and orderly reception station.

"Hermione, love, schedule Mr Smith for another appointment in a week, will you?" He hands me the rest of Snape's paperwork and hovers about, waiting to lock up.

"Of course, Dad."

Snape says nothing as I sort through the appropriate forms and indicate where he should sign.

Gracing him with a small smile, I ask, "Would three thirty next Thursday work for you, or do you need another time?"

"That will be adequate." His voice is tight, carefully neutral.

"Well, then, you're all set for today. We'll see you in a week."

He once again looks as if he's about to speak, but snaps his mouth closed and turns after a curt nod.

Dad follows him to the door, shutting it and turning the bolt.

When he faces me, I take a deep breath and begin. "Dad."

"Yes, love?"

"Dad, we need to talk."

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Friday

"Mione! It's so good to see you!" Harry's grin is large and infectious as he pulls back from our hug.

"Oh, Harry, you too! It's been so long, and that's all my fault. But I'd like that to change and change drastically if you agree."

He settles onto one end of the sofa and gestures me to the other. "Of course, Mione I'd love to see you more often."

"How about really often?" I look down briefly, nervously smoothing my hands over my trouser legs before looking up and meeting his friendly yet puzzled gaze. "You know how you offered me the chance to keep living here even though ... even though Ron was gone?"

He nods agreement.

"Well," I continue, "if the offer still stands, I'd like to take you up on it."

I'm engulfed in another hug. "That's smashing, Mione, absolutely smashing!" He sits back on his end of the sofa, yet it seems as if I can feel the warmth of his grin from

here. "Would you want your old room back? Or maybe another one? One further from the drawing room? I don't think I can get you any closer to the library "

"Harry," I laugh, "my old room is fine! I mean I'll redecorate it, but it's fine. And you're sure?"

"Sure? I'm dead chuffed! You don't ... you don't know how big this house is these days, Mione. How empty without the Order meetings or ... you or ... Ron."

Looking closely for the first time in ages, I see that his face is haunted the pinch of loneliness around his mouth, the haunt of sadness in his eyes.

Oh, Harry.

"It's hard, isn't it? Missing him." I pause. "And what with Mum and all, I wasn't exactly here for you."

"No, Hermione don't think that! You had so much to deal with. So much ..." His voice fades away, and we sit quietly for a few moments until he shakes himself and smiles at me again. "But you're here now! How did all of this come about?"

"I need to get my life started again, so I told Dad I'm resigning and moving out." I laugh. "I suppose I should have made sure I had a place first, but it seemed right at the time."

"And how'd he take it? He was a right mess last year ..."

"Better than I expected, actually. He sputtered for a bit but then went on about wanting me to be happy. It helps that I should be able to train Maggie for my job I'm sure she could have done it after Mum passed, but ..."

"And you, what will you do?"

"Well, I was hoping I could ask you for another favour!"

"Anything."

"If you still have them, could I borrow your *Daily Prophets* from the past two weeks or so? I'm going to look for an apprenticeship."

"Of course. You always did talk about continuing your studies."

"Yes, well, I'm glad you approve because it's going to mean having a poor student for a housemate."

"Anything to have you here, Hermione. Anything." His expression grows more thoughtful and then a bit mischievous. "And there's one other good thing about all of this having you here means Ginny will visit more often!"

I swat his leg and laugh along with him.

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Saturday

"Hmm, let's see." I run my finger along the advertisements in the back of yesterday's *Daily Prophet*. "Damn not a single apprenticeship being offered. Again!"

I've gone through the entire stack, and found only one one! for the past two weeks. And that was for Herbology, which isn't a field I have that much natural affinity for.

Why couldn't it have been Arithmancy, Charms, Transfiguration, or Potions? any of those would do I find them all fascinating!

Taking another sip of tea, I set down the cup and stand to make some breakfast. When the bread emerges from the toaster and wears a generous layer of Flora, I sit again.

Only one bite in, I hear a scratch at the window and get up to let the Daily Prophet delivery owl in.

It's a good thing that Harry's redirecting his subscription to me until I move to Grimmauld Place. Getting an apprenticeship may be even more difficult than I thought.

Untying the paper, I place money in the bag attached to its leg and offer up some toast.

As soon as it's flown away, and the window's closed, I sit and rip open the paper to the last pages and run my finger down one more column. "Nope ... no ... oh, please ... is that even legal? ... no ... eww ..."

"Ahhh!" I almost drop the paper in shock. "Potions Master seeks apprentice. Only those with the very highest OWL and NEWT scores need apply. Owl the *Daily Prophet* with your information as a response to advertisement #98693."

Or maybe not that difficult!

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Wednesday

I've got used to the breakfast visit from the newspaper owl. But the scratch on the window a half hour later sets my heart racing.

This owl holds its leg out rather impatiently and appears not at all impressed by the trembling of my hands.

Oh, please, please, please. There hasn't been another advertisement for the past four issues of the paper I have to get this one.

"Ms Granger, Your records appear adequate. Reply with your final acceptance, and I will expect to see you next Monday. Derrick Damocles, Potions Master."

Damocles didn't he do that work on the Dreamless Sleep recently? That was capital research!

My heart races, and I'm smiling so widely it almost hurts.

"Please wait," I say to the owl, giving it a biscuit fresh from the tin.

Gathering parchment and quill, I dash off an effusively positive reply.

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Thursday

Maggie is still finishing up with Ms Moulton as I wander into the reception area, her sun-lightened blond head bobbing in agreement with the patient's concerns. "Yes, yes you're perfectly right. There's no call for them to say the paperwork wasn't filed. I have confirmation that they received the fax on the 17th."

"Oh, I know it wasn't you, deary. Why, you're ever so dedicated! No, I'm sure it's those incompetent blighters in the NHS office. If they query it again, can I have them ring you?"

"Of course, Ms Moulton. That would be no trouble at all. You just have them ring me, and I'll have them sorted in no time."

"Cheers, love, cheers."

The patients really do love her.

As Ms Moulton toddles away, Maggie finishes sorting the paperwork and returns the folder to its appropriate location in the filing cabinet. Which, of course, opens with no sign of protest.

And she's very good at all of this.

"Maggie."

"Yes, Hermione?" She turns to me with a large smile teeth white against holiday-tanned skin, her pretty face showing her joy over the promotion.

And happy to have me gone, I'll wager.

But who can blame her? I've been a right bint to her.

I return her smile with warmth I've been trying all week to repair our relationship since she'll be such an important part of Dad's life. Not that a week can do more than slap a plaster on a year's worth of troubles, but it's better than naught.

"I've found the forms for ordering from Barrett and Brothers they're that last supplier I was telling you about."

"Right then let's have a look at them."

"Mostly, what we order from them are the disposable items Dr Granger uses everyday his gloves, the pre-strung floss, etc." I point to the various sections of the form as I speak of them and then hand the entire packet to her.

It was actually a challenge to explain the ordering to Maggie without using Arithmancy!

I'm just glad I'll never have to turn away from magic again.

"You can always stock up on such things have them all sorted well ahead of time," I add. "It's the buffing paste and mouth rinse that come from Tustin's Tooth Supplies that you'll want to keep a closer watch on they'll go off if they get too old."

She nods whilst continuing to look over the order sheet.

Therefore, I'm the one available to greet the next patient to walk through the door.

"Mr Smith, how nice to see you again." There's no hint of sarcasm in my voice today.

Snape scowls slightly before replying, "Ms Granger."

Maggie, still looking at the forms intently, begins to rise.

"Don't get up." I place one hand on her shoulder. "You stay here and look those over I'll take him back. It's room two that's ready?"

Nodding, she settles into her chair.

"If you'll follow me, Mr Smith."

The hallway is as short as last time, but I no longer have a reason to rush. In fact, I remain in the room as Snape situates himself in the chair, adjusting the curtains and rearranging the magazines resting on the side table. Another of Maggie's *Cosmopolitans* makes an appearance, this one declaring in bright yellow: "Is His Tongue Too Sharp? Find Something Else For Him To Do With It!"

Snickering, I shift it to the top of the stack, and my smile only grows as I hear Snape give a rather dramatic sigh behind me.

"Ms Granger, to what do I owe the pleasure of your excessive cheerfulness? It is enough to make me practically long for the moody temper I found you in last week. At least then I had some peace."

Turning towards him, I notice that he isn't wearing the expression I expected he's smirking instead of glowering. Which, I must admit, causes me to be at somewhat of a loss for words. After all, how do I say, "Thank you for giving me the kick in the arse I needed?"

I've been staring, and the raising of his eyebrow jolts me back to the immediacy of the present. "I received some good news yesterday, if you must know."

His eyebrow ratchets higher.

"I'm beginning an apprenticeship with a respected Potions Master next week."

His face goes carefully neutral, and I worry that I've offended him, so words stream out of me in an initial rush that soon trickles to a stop when I run out of ideas. "I would have asked you, but it seemed as if you were no longer involved in the Wizarding world, and ..."

He soon fills the awkward silence. "And you would be correct, Ms Granger. Severus Snape is dead to the Wizarding world, and I expect him to remain that way."

"But why? Dumbledore's Pensieve clarified the situation of his death, and you could tell what you did during the Final Battle. I'll even "

"You will do nothing, Ms Granger, for I have found an adequate solution to the problem." When I begin to speak again, he holds up a hand to forestall me and adds, "And whilst I am sure it is highly exciting for you to feel that you will finally be living up to your potential, I must ask that you stop your eternal prattling and leave me in peace."

I open my mouth again, unwilling to be so easily put off, but Dad chooses that moment to enter. "Well, then, dear everything settled?" At my nod he continues. "All right, then, Mr Smith. Today's visit should be quick. We're just going to check the fit of the moulds I cast last time. No need for another cleaning or anything of the sort."

The low rumble of Snape's reply is lost as Dad hurries me from the room and shuts the door.

I look in on Maggie, but she's sorting papers and humming happily under her breath, so I wander into my office to settle some of my own work.

Smiling, I reread the note that Ginny owed me this morning saying that she can help move me into Grimmauld Place this weekend.

I can't wait to see Harry's face when I tell him the news.

It'll be good to see if those two can get back together.

Still grinning, I pick up last month's copy of *The Journal of the Magical Potions Society*. In only a week, I've been able to skim most of the previous year's issues by visiting the Ministry library every evening, but I bought this issue yesterday because I need to take a closer look at what Damocles has been working on.

After all, it's what I'm going to be doing for the next three years.

I'm still trying to suss the methodology Damocles is attempting for altering Dreamless Sleep so that it can be used long term without negative side effects when I hear a door open and Dad's voice.

"... you'll want to avoid drinking anything staining like tea for an hour or so after you've applied the gel. Just so you get the best results, mind."

Moving to the doorway, I watch as Snape follows Dad back to the reception area and decide to try one last time to speak with him, even though I'm still not sure of what to say.

Maybe I could just say, 'Thank you.'

Dad's giving Maggie instructions, even though she's still better at administration than he'll ever be. "This one was a what do you call it? a half of an appointment instead of a whole."

Her smile never waivers as she says, "It's called a partial consultation."

"Partial consultation that's it!" He beams back at her before continuing. "And he won't need to see me for another fortnight or so."

Dad moves past me towards his office as she nods and turns to Snape. "So, Mr Smith, does Thursday in two weeks sound all right?"

"That will be fine, Ms ..."

"It's Maggie. Everyone calls me Maggie."

"Maggie." He appears to almost taste her given name as he rolls it across his tongue. I'm glad she's looking at the schedule book because it appears as if he doesn't find such informality sweet.

The chuckle I'm suppressing almost escapes when he meets my eyes and raises one sardonic eyebrow, and I stuff my fist against my mouth to smother it.

Then, he spins abruptly on one heel and walks through the door his Muggle clothing fails to swirl, yet it still seems a dramatic exit.

I'm still staring at the place he just disappeared from.

Will I ever see him again?

I wonder why my stomach clenches a bit at the thought.

Maggie's voice cuts through my introspection. "Oh, no!"

"What is it?"

"It's only that I meant to tell Mr Smith his address doesn't appear to be complete on the forms." She picks up the paperwork and shuffles to the correct page. "There's no post code for where he lives, for this ... Spinner's End whatsit."

Spinner's End? But that's where Damocles lives.

Why the clever git!

"I'll ask him." High on the adrenaline buzz of indignation, I sprint out of the office and down the hallway. Clattering down the stairs, I just see a swirl of black turn the corner below me, so I put on another burst of speed.

He must have heard me coming and as I wasn't making any attempt at stealth, who wouldn't for he halts and turns to face me, one eyebrow quirking in query.

I'm a bit out of breath but nonetheless gasp out, "Derrick Damocles?"

"Well, you must allow that it is marginally more original than Simon Smith or some such." He smirks. "I will see you on Monday, Ms Granger."

"Yes. Yes, you will."

A few steps later, he calls over his shoulder, "Oh, and see to it that you cancel that next appointment for me. I find that there actually is a Wizarding means by which I can achieve the desired results."

The ruddy bastard! He knew all along!

As his deep chuckle reaches my ears, I let out one of my own.

Three years with him? I may have to rethink that decision about not being sarcastic.

oOoOoOo

AN: It's become fanon for Hermione and the trio to discover that Snape lives at Spinner's End, but who knows what canon will bring?

Feedback appreciated!