

Thou Winter Wind

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Blow, blow, thou winter wind

Thou art not so unkind,

As man's ingratitude.

-William Shakespeare

She didn't mean for it happen. It just did. She wasn't expecting to run into him tonight, at any rate. Perhaps she should have, but who would have thought that the formerly anti-social bat of the dungeons would have chosen tonight, of all nights, to attend a Ministry Anniversary function, celebrating the downfall of Voldemort?

She hadn't seen him for over two years ... not since he had walked out of her life without a word of explanation.

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Their relationship, if one could call it that, had been born out of a desperate want and a desperate need ... a relationship of then-mutual convenience.

It had come out of nowhere. They had worked together as the Final Battle approached. Being amongst the few Order members who were familiar with the Muggle world, they had met covertly in the least likely of places to exchange information. As tensions on both sides of the battle had risen higher and higher, their tempers had become shorter and shorter. An all-out screaming match between them had led unexpectedly to him grabbing her and kissing her senseless. At first she had been absolutely shocked and then, surprisingly, had found herself responding with equally fervent ardour. She had been very much surprised to discover how much pent-up passion lay beneath the mask that Severus Snape was forced to wear, living as both a Death Eater and a spy. They had somehow made it from the dingy bar to a nearby hotel without making complete fools of themselves. All they had been able to think about was the raw, primal urge that their hormones were driving them to satiate.

Their coupling had been driven by mutual need and repressed frustration. There had been no foreplay, no sweet nothings murmured in ears, no gentle caresses. It had been hot, hard, and fast. Flashes of memories from that night would still cause Hermione to blush at inopportune times. When they had both recovered from their climaxes, they had looked at each other in shock. Neither one had wanted to be the one to speak first. They had dressed awkwardly and silently, not meeting each other's eyes for fear of what they would see. Finally, Snape had cleared his throat in order to break the uncomfortable silence.

"I will be in touch in the usual manner."

His tone had been gruff and business-like. Hermione, who had been still very much in shock, could only nod. Snape had inclined his head and raised his eyebrow at her.

He had opened his mouth to speak, but had then apparently reconsidered and let it fall shut without voicing his thoughts. He had strode purposefully towards the door and left. Hermione had fallen backwards onto the bed and had stared at the ugly, stained ceiling. *What just happened here? Did I really just have sex with Severus Snape?* she had thought as she stared helplessly about the darkened room.

She had left that room feeling very confused and a more than a little uncomfortable when thinking about their next meeting. Would he want to do this again? Would he even want to speak of it? Would he pretend it had not even happened? Did she want it to happen again? Her head had been so full of questions that she hadn't been able to think straight for several hours.

She had numbly made her report to the Order at Grimmauld Place and had avoided the inquisitive looks from a certain female red-head and her mother. She had hidden herself in her bedroom upstairs and sobbed into her pillow under the comfort of a Silencing Charm. She hadn't been able to explain any rational reason for her tears but had let them flow as a release from her confused emotions.

They had met several more times between that day and the Final Battle. They had not fallen into bed every time, but it was often enough to confuse her and to satiate the mounting sexual frustration that plagued her between each encounter. Each time, she would head into their meeting with her mind made up no more sex. On those occasions when their meetings had ended up horizontally, she had found herself giving into the traitorous responses of her own body as it betrayed her mind and her heart. She had enjoyed the physical pleasures of intercourse with an experienced partner, but she had found that it had not always outweighed the heaviness in her heart at the end of the night.

None of the subsequent encounters had held the same panicked urgency as the first, but they were no less passionate. Severus Snape was a skilled partner and had been attentive to her needs as well as his. What he could not or would not express in words, he appeared to express with his hands, his fingers, his tongue, and his body. They had not kissed anymore after the first night, which Hermione had found somewhat odd at first, but it had made sense to her in retrospect. Oddly, kissing was far too intimate for their situation.

Each encounter had ended similarly. It had always been awkward. They had dressed in the uncomfortable silence, and both had waited for the other to speak first. Snape had always been the first to lose his patience with the quiet and to make a noise of some sort. He had muttered something about next time and had left without any acknowledgement of their actions. Hermione had often lain there for an hour afterwards dealing with her conflicting emotions before cleaning herself up and making her report to the Order.

But the last encounter, right before the Battle, had been different. He had been significantly more tender with his passions and had taken care of her twice before seeking his own release. They had lain there for a long time in an uncomfortable silence before he had made a move to sit up and begin the hunt for hastily discarded clothing. When he had been dressed, he had stilled for a moment.

"Be careful," Snape had said simply.

Afraid to meet his eyes, Hermione had looked down at her hands, which were absentmindedly twisting the sheets. There were things she had wanted to say but had not possessed the courage to open her mouth. *Gryffindor indeed*, she had internally chastised herself. Suddenly, his hand had been on her chin, grasping it and holding it in place. Snape had leaned forward before she could take any other action and had captured her lips in a passion-filled, breathtaking kiss. It had seemed to go on forever and, yet, not long enough.

He had been gone almost the instant his lips had released hers, leaving her ten times more confused than ever. Something had changed that night, and his actions had perplexed her further. He was such a mass of contradictions. Or rather, *they* were a mass of contradictions.

In the aftermath of the Battle, she had searched and searched for him. She had not found his body, and for that she had been relieved. Slowly, news trickled in and revealed that he had been captured by the Ministry and held for questioning. Albus Dumbledore had fallen in the course of the battle and could not vouch for him. Because Minerva McGonagall had been recuperating in Hogwarts' Hospital Wing and had been unable to attend the trial, Hermione had thrown herself into organizing a defence for him on behalf of the Order.

Due to excellent evidence left behind by the late Albus Dumbledore, courtesy of his Pensieve, and Hermione's unwavering persistence, Snape had been pardoned. She had walked up to him after the hearing had been over. She had not seen him since the night he had unexpectedly kissed her on the eve of battle. Before she could utter a single word, he had turned to her and given her such a look of loathing and hatred that it had stopped her dead in her tracks. Hermione had not expected words of praise for her defence or anything of the like. She was not sure she had known what to expect. But certainly not the look she had received, that was akin to how he had looked upon his most despised students.

She had fled without saying anything to him while he had chuckled darkly at her rapidly retreating figure. She had fumed for days over his reaction or, rather, his non-reaction to her presence. And of course, she had been even more confused than before.

Ginny had finally cornered her after the trial and, after generous amounts of alcohol and comfort food, had eventually pried the whole story from Hermione. Much to Hermione's surprise, Ginny had not chastised her for her actions and had simply offered her a shoulder to cry on. When Hermione had been much calmer, Ginny had suggested distraction was perhaps the best option. Hermione had tearfully agreed.

In the subsequent months after the Battle, Ginny had nudged Hermione into having dinner or drinks with several attractive wizards. To Ginny's credit, she had picked ones who were actually well-suited to Hermione, and Hermione soon had found herself in a happy, healthy relationship with a Muggle-born wizard named Hunter Greenburg. She had also found herself settled in her newfound position as the Ministry's Cultural Liaison to the Muggles.

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Hermione Granger frowned at her reminiscing about the past and leaned onto the mahogany table in front of her for support, nursing a vodka cranberry and choosing to people-watch rather than socialize.

"Where is your companion, Miss Granger? Off getting you another drink?" Severus Snape's velvety voice wrapped her in a cocoon of warmth. She desperately tried to shrug that feeling off while outwardly showing that his sudden appearance had not affected her in the slightest.

"To whom do you refer, Professor?" Hermione replied coolly, hoping her emotions were hidden deep inside. She had no desire to let Snape know how much he had affected her, then or now.

"I refer to the wizard with whom you are in a *relationship*." Snape's lip curled in distaste at the word 'relationship.'

Hermione let out an unladylike snort and downed a healthy gulp of her vodka cranberry. This action appeared to confuse the dark wizard. "I am unattached, Professor. I am no longer in a *relationship* with anyone," Hermione said evenly.

"How unfortunate for you. How fortunate for me," said Snape coolly.

Hermione set her glass down with more force than was necessary and shattered it. She unsheathed her wand and jabbed it angrily towards the shards of broken glass. "*Reparo*," she intoned, and the tumbler obediently reassembled itself, sans the liquid, which was now pooled on the tabletop. The broken glass problem solved, Hermione turned to Snape. "What do you mean fortunate for you? Since when do you have a place in my life? You walked out of it over two years ago without a single word. The only response I got was a withering glance at the end of your trial." Hermione bit her words out and practically spit them at him with venom.

The anger was emanating from the witch in nearly palpable waves. People around them were beginning to notice. Hermione knew that Snape, by nature, was not a public person and preferred to conduct discussions about his life behind closed doors. So did she, in fact. But she was so incensed that she no longer cared who overheard their

discussion. He grabbed her arm suddenly and she tried to wrench it away from him.

"Unhand me at once, Professor," Hermione demanded indignantly as she continued to struggle in his firm, unrelenting grasp.

"Witch, you are causing a scene. I am simply trying to remove us to a less noticeable and less public location." Snape lowered his voice even more to prevent being overheard as he forced his own words out with great emphasis.

"No!" Hermione said loudly. "Don't touch me. Leave me alone!" Snape was surprised at her outburst and unconsciously loosened his hold enough so that she was able to disentangle herself from his grip and flee out in the corridor.

Hermione ran quickly to prevent anyone from seeing the tears that threatened to rush down her cheeks in torrents. How dare he show up here as if nothing had changed? She leaned weakly against a wall and let the tears flow. She sobbed as all the suppressed anger and resentment unburied itself, and she allowed it be released in the gut-wrenching sobs and in the tears that streamed down her face. She was so consumed in her emotional release that she was unaware of his presence until he laid a single hand on her shoulder.

Instinctively, she knew it was *his* hand, and she tried to shrug it off. That only made him grip her more firmly, and she sobbed even harder.

"I said...I said to leave me alone. Go away!" Hermione sputtered out between sobs.

"Miss Granger. Hermione. I..."

Hermione straightened up at the sound of her given name being uttered from his lips. "You don't have the right to call me that, Professor." She emphasized his title as if it left a bad taste in her mouth.

"Don't I? I've shared your bed, haven't I?" Snape said silkily, which only served to infuriate her more.

"No, you simply took what you sought ... physical release with the most available witch. I'm sure it meant nothing to you." Hermione was quickly losing steam and venom, despite her well-rooted anger.

"You don't know the truth, Granger. You simply think you do. Some Know-It-All." He spat her former nickname at her with force. He unhand her unexpectedly, and she staggered slightly as she regained her balance.

Snape turned so he was facing away from her and spoke to the wall. His shoulders were squared and his spine ramrod-straight. Hermione peeked at him through tear-filled eyes as she tried to regain control of her emotions.

Snape hadn't planned on this particular outcome of the evening. He had come tonight expressly to see her. He had heard through reliable sources that she was in a happy, long-term relationship and figured that enough time had passed for him to be able to see her in person without feeling crushing despair at the fact that she was lost to him for good. He also hoped that she would not act immaturely upon seeing him again. He hadn't anticipated the vitriol that she had accumulated over the years nor her unexpectedly single status. Suddenly, he was being forced to confess his true emotions ... or at least as much truth as he could allow himself to reveal.

"You don't understand, Granger, how hard it was to turn you away that day in the courtroom. I did it for your own good." These sentences came out haltingly, as if it pained him to say them aloud. He paused for a moment and sighed deeply, his shoulders slumping slightly. "I had to protect you. From me."

"Why?" The word left Hermione's mouth before she even processed her lips forming it. Snape turned to face her, his face half-hidden by the curtain of his hair.

"Because I cared for you more than I should have. It...unnerved me. My name has been besmirched by my ties with the Death Eaters. Even the words of the vaunted Albus Dumbledore do not clear me in the eyes of many witches and wizards in our world. I could not allow my reputation to taint your own."

Hermione was shocked into silence. It took many moments for her to recover her wits and work out what Snape had said.

"You...you ungrateful git!" was all Hermione managed to sputter.

Snape's head snapped up in shock, and his eyes widened in surprise. That was certainly not the outburst he expected. "Pardon me?" fell from his lips almost automatically.

"You heard me. How could you do that to me? What gave you the right to make the decision all on your own without consulting me? As they say in the Muggle world, it takes two to tango. Do you know how much anguish and grief you have caused me over the last two years? Do you have any idea how you've tainted my life with your presence ... with your absence? You've made me hate you, Severus Snape. You took what was supposedly intimate and turned it into a joke." Hermione sneered at him. "You're a spy. Surely you could have found some way to contact me over the years without gaining notice. Sure, you didn't want to cause a scene in public, but to turn me away as if I was one of Hagrid's disgusting magical creatures, fit only to be a piece of dirt on the bottom of your boot? What did I do to deserve that?"

Hermione was so anger-filled that bluish sparks were starting to crackle at the tip of her wand. Snape had to act, to distract her, and he could think of nothing else but to kiss her senseless.

She immediately stiffened up, refused to kiss him back and pushed him away. "No, Snape. Don't touch me. You no longer have the right. I regret ever giving you permission in the first place."

He grabbed her again, more forcefully this time, and sealed his lips over hers, using his tongue to coax apart her lips. How he had missed kissing those lips after their first heat-filled encounter. He had stopped because he could not allow himself to become too deeply attached to the tantalising witch. Snape was persistent in his attentions but still allowed her the right to push him away again. He would not force her into something she did not want to do, but both she and he knew that he had made it through all of her defences.

Hermione slowly, reluctantly began to respond to his advances. Long-repressed passion soon took over her rational mind, and she returned his kisses with equal fervency. He pressed his entire body against hers, slowly pushing her into the wall to further their contact and to free his hands for other uses.

Not wanting their so-called reunion to take place in a darkened hallway of the Ministry, they quickly found an unused room. Snape cast a Silencing Spell and wards to alert them of anyone's presence whilst Hermione Transfigured a table into a suitable mattress. Before she lowered herself onto the mattress, Snape took her by the arm again and held her close to him. He wanted to look into her eyes, but at the last minute, reconsidered. He was not quite sure he wanted to see the truth of the naked emotions in her face ... a truth he was not prepared to acknowledge.

"Nox," he muttered and laid his wand down next to his discarded shoes. Hermione muttered a contraceptive spell and discarded hers as well. They fell into each other's arms as if no time had passed.

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True to old times, their encounter ended as before, with an awkward silence where neither knew exactly what to say. Hermione reached for her clothing first and dressed jerkily, facing away from him. When she was done, she turned her head slightly, giving him a profile view of her face. Her body was stiff, and every muscle was tense.

"I'm sorry. I can't do this anymore. You'll only hurt me again, and I don't know if I'll be able to recover. I don't trust myself with you. Please, don't try to find me again." Hermione's voice cracked under the pain of her loss and decision.

Snape surveyed her, his face impassive, but his mind in turmoil.

She was right, in a way ... he always seemed to bring pain to those he cared for. His heart hurt incredibly. Why would she stay? He had seemingly treated her with careless indifference. From her perspective, he had used her as a matter of convenience. He couldn't explain the depth of his true feelings to her, and it was already too late. Snape only bowed his head in acknowledgement and slumped his shoulders, defeated.

Hermione left the room without a backward glance.