

Daybreak

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Part II of "Evening." Hermione Granger considers her relationship with Severus Snape on a morning like many others.

Chapter One

Chapter 1 of 1

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Author's Note: Hello, hello, hello! Everyone left such lovely reviews for "Evening" that I've decided a continuation was in order. This one is in Hermione's POV, as was requested a few times. For those of you who haven't read the counter-part, have no worries, this can stand alone. However, if you enjoy this, you might consider checking out Severus' POV, as some little details show up in both fics.

This was a lot of fun to write, and I hope you enjoy reading it. If you do, might I suggest reviewing? We're a community, after all, right? Thanks a lot :o)

And now for the disclaimer: I am eternally grateful to JK Rowling (who is not me) for bringing us those books I do so love (and did not write) and for allowing other authors to write fan fiction inspired by said books (work for which I am making not a penny).

It's the sun that always wakes me. My own fault, really, as I was the one who charmed the windows to catch the sunrise. Severus still grumbles about it from time to time, but it's been months, and he has yet to change the view. His rooms are actually quite pleasant when lit like this, though I do prefer them after the sun has gone down. During these winter months, the sitting room is fairly warm and the firewood is nicely seasoned, like those Muggle vacation lodges at mountain ski resorts or something. Perhaps that's why I fall asleep so quickly here. It's all very reminiscent of Gryffindor Tower.

Crookshanks hates me for it, but I just toss and turn when I'm in my own bed. There are certain sounds that I've grown accustomed to hearing before I sleep, like the slide of parchment when Severus turns a page, that clinking noise of his sherry glass on the rough wooden table, and the small, rhythmic breezes of his exhalation. The combination never fails to make my eyelids heavy.

I squint to adjust my eyes to the early morning light. My body feels like stone, but as comfortable as I am, I usually leave before Severus wakes up. For a minute or so, I lounge and stretch, feeling quite euphoric. There is so much to do in the student labs in preparation for their return, but it's entirely too early to get started, so I think I'll just laze a bit for now.

The satisfaction of being an apprentice feels almost bone deep at the end of the day. Ron and Harry were never as productive as they could be in school, try as I might to encourage them, but working with Severus every day is more interesting than any classes I can remember taking here at Hogwarts.

When I first started, my only work was to grade assignments and prepare the ingredient shelves for classes, but I've since become more involved in the research and brewing end of things. When he isn't snarling or prowling about like Mrs. Norris, I can appreciate his intelligence, and it thrills me to work with someone who shows as much interest in their studies as I do.

As I sit up, my blanket slides off the smooth leather of the couch to pool at my feet. I suppose it isn't actually my blanket, but I very much doubt Severus had any use for the thing before I unearthed it from his linen closet. I pick it up, stand, and curve my back one last time before walking across the room to the study. This is where I always fold and place the throw, on the back of a very regal looking chair. I told Severus it was a shame to hide such beautiful cashmere in a closet full of cotton sheets.

There is a massive desk against one wall, opposite an impressive collection of texts. I know some of the books are my own, but our libraries are so mixed at this point, it would be silly to try and sort through it all. He's quite generous with his things, though I think that applies more to me than most everyone else in this castle.

The kindness he shows me now, that which I never expected from him as a student, has everything to do with the end of the war. Though he isn't exactly friendly to Harry and Ron, I know that he's grateful to all three of us. One of my strongest memories of that smoky battlefield, where we fought the Death Eaters for the last time, was the survivors, some staggering and collapsing on fragile limbs, and some frantic to conjure stretchers and help the wounded. Among them was Severus. He was hunched over in the blood-saturated grass, cradling his scarred left arm, shivering and stunned, like the gift of survival was too monumental for him to comprehend at the time. As it always does when recalling that particular moment, my chest aches with compassion and admiration.

My stomach growls for a minute, and my thoughts are drawn to Crookshanks. He'll be moody if I don't let him out to hunt some time soon, but I expect he's still asleep; it wouldn't hurt to spend a few minutes here.

I exit the study and detour to the kitchen. The staff quarters are outfitted with a small cooking area and an adjoining dining room that a group of four or so would find cozy for a meal. Not that Severus entertains. I'm sure that I'm the most company he's had in ages, but his efforts to make me comfortable are more than I can expect from Ron or Harry when I visit their flats.

Standing on my tiptoes, I just barely reach the uppermost cabinet that holds the tea cups, but I manage to bring down our two favorite ones without shattering the rest of the china. Every so often I stay around for breakfast, and each time I do, Severus forgoes the, admittedly better, meal in the Great Hall to eat whatever I prepare. I set down the cups to take off my robe, wrinkled and sleep-worn. I unfasten the front clasp, but before I can shrug off the material, a pair of hands slides the fabric from my shoulders.

Severus is smoothing the robe out with one hand, holding it high with the other, as I turn around. He deposits it on an unused bit of counter before he speaks.

"Don't let me disturb you, Miss Granger. By all means, cook my breakfast. I should think allowing you to traipse about my rooms barefoot warrants some sort of reciprocity."

I can tell already that he is in a good mood; he usually is when I spend the morning.

He isn't in his formal robes yet as it's still too early to do much of anything, let alone shower and suit up in a scratchy wool coat. Instead he is wearing the fleece house robe that I think he prefers above most everything in his wardrobe, he uses it so often. Yawning and rubbing his sleep-clouded eyes, his appearance has about as much bite as his words do.

"Morning. Sorry to wake you so early. Speaking of bare feet, the warming charms on these floors could do with refurbishing. Fruit and tea?" I begin to dig through a basket of apples, oranges and nectarines. The ripest ones usually lay forgotten at the bottom. Before I can make my selection, his hands are once again on my shoulders, maneuvering me in the direction of the table and chairs.

"Sit. Do you eat anything other than fruit? I'll fix you a proper meal with the appropriate breakfast fare. And I rather think your feet could do with slippers. There is nothing wrong with my floors. However, you insist on renouncing normal sleepwear, and I won't be responsible for the loss of toes frostbite will surely bring you."

He produces his wand from a pocket and absently waves it downwards while reaching for a plate. I feel a spark of warmth where one of my feet rests on the floor; the other is tucked under me as I sit at the table, watching Severus. I'd be offended at his ordering me about if it weren't for the amusement in his tone and the fact that he is fixing me breakfast.

I've learned to spot his thinly veiled acts of kindness, those things he does to take care of me without drawing attention to it, like covering me with the blanket when I end up on his couch at night. I'd like to sit him down and do the same, but he is hardly receptive to fussing. There was that one time when Poppy ordered him to rest in bed for a couple of weeks, recovering from exposure to volatile ingredients. He let me apply the healing paste to his lacerations and read a few articles out loud that I thought he'd like. I myself would probably hex Harry or Ron if they ever tried to pamper me like that. But this is different. Severus doesn't treat me like Ron treated Lavender Brown, and thank Merlin for it.

I pull my messy, tangled hair away from my face. It'll need a good bit of taming this morning if I'm ever to get it to lay flat again. I can hear and smell something frying, but Severus is blocking my view of things. Cooking isn't entirely necessary for a wizard, of course, but it is the winter hols, and the whole process is pleasing to the senses and a gratifying way to waste time. That, and Severus would never summon a house-elf in front of me. The last time he made that mistake I'm fairly certain he'd found a kindred soul in Ron, if only for a moment.

These thoughts of cooking and food remind me quite suddenly of my bimonthly tradition and the bar of dark chocolate in my nightstand awaiting delivery to Severus' desk. I might as well just hand it to him, as he won't be spending time in his classroom today. The thought of giving it to him in person feels oddly personal, like some sort of admission or confirmation. I suppose that can happen when something's been left unsaid for so long.

My contemplation is interrupted as Severus slides a plate and a cup in front of me before taking the adjacent seat and laying the napkin in his lap meticulously. I run a fork sideways through the eggs to cut them. A small hill of sausage, fried tomato, toast, and tea is laid out in front of me. I'm prompted to begin eating with a sharp look.

"Thank you, Severus, it's delicious. I can't remember the last time someone who wasn't Molly Weasley cooked for me." My mouth is somewhat full, but I get the words out.

He doesn't respond, just reaches over to brush a crumb from my sleeve.

I can't keep the smile from my face, busy as my mouth is. This gesture reminds me so strongly of Mum and Dad, absently grooming one another as they read their newspapers or watch the telly together. Severus doesn't know it, or he just chooses to ignore it, but he really is a rather affectionate person.

Ginny told me weeks ago that, as far as she was concerned, he and I are already as happily married as her own parents are. The thought brought me the same happiness as my N.E.W.T.s results did when first I tore open that envelope and counted the O's. It still does. In contrast, feelings of dread hit me like a Quaffle to the chest, or something just as unpleasant, when I think of this ending.

And the end is inevitable. The apprenticeship won't last forever, and when I've gained my status as Potions master, there will be no reason for me to stay here. Of course, I won't just be leaving. Even Ron can tell that I care about Severus, and I certainly won't pack up and be off the moment I complete my final project, as though that were all this relationship could bring me.

I stop the onslaught of emotions and thoughts by concentrating all of my attention on the food. Such strong sentiment really clouds the brain. Logically, there is no reason to fret now. I've still got months left in which to complete my masterpiece, and the dining room table isn't the place to contemplate these things.

Severus finishes his last sausage and wipes the corners of his mouth as though we were sitting in the middle of an upscale eatery. I push my empty plate out in front of me and consider the day's tasks, my scholarly obligations taking priority.

"I thought we'd get started on the fifth years' lesson plans today and work our way up. I know you wanted to add the Forgetfulness Potion to the curriculum, which means the schedule for the next few weeks will need some adjusting. I might also have time to run over to Slug's for some valerian. Pomona's crop was eaten by the Fanged Carnations. How much do you think we'll need?"

"Four bunches of roots should be sufficient. Don't pay more than fifteen sickles for the lot of it. Jigger will no doubt want a ridiculous amount of gold. If he aggravates you, you may tell him that I've no trouble looking for an alternate supplier. On second thought, perhaps it's best that I escort you. I'll not have my apprentice strolling about the shops all day when there's work to be done."

I smile in return to the jibe. The humor in his expression is subtle, and if this exchange weren't perfectly customary between us, I might mistake his comment for an insult. Really though, there is nothing he could possibly criticize about my work ethic. If anything, I keep him focused.

Severus stands and begins to clear away the dishes. My foot has fallen asleep and is beginning to feel acutely sensitive to the smallest movements as I move it out from under me. I flex my calf muscles several times until the sensations ebb, and then rise to pick up our tea cups and wipe the water rings from the surface of the table with my sleeve. The shirt will need washing anyway.

I place the cups on the counter where he promptly charms them clean again and places them in the cabinet with ease. This kitchen is well suited for his height. The castle is known for doing small favors for its inhabitants.

"It's chilly out this morning, but I'd rather we go now before Diagon Alley is swarmed with holiday shoppers. Just give me a minute to change and we'll Floo to the Cauldron."

"I suppose I'm able to spare a moment this morning." Severus heaves a sigh that is a bit too forced to be convincing, though I won't tell him. He addresses me again. "Would it be exceedingly optimistic of me to assume you can primp yourself in a timely fashion?"

"Well, I was hoping to at least change my jumper. Alright with you?"

I leave the kitchen and dining area to fetch my shoes and wand, both of which are in the sitting room where I had abandoned them last night. I decide to leave my book, a compilation of amphibians and such, here in Severus' rooms, my robe too. There's no sense in moving my things around, as they'll just end up back here this evening.

Severus enters the sitting room and heads for his sleeping chambers. I'm passing the couch when he speaks again, briefly glancing my way.

"Do not forget to wear robes befitting the weather, Miss Granger. I won't be paving your way with warming charms while we're about."

In the space of time between my pulling the door closed and it dissolving back into the stone corridor walls, I hear his bedroom door click shut.

I make my way through the cool halls towards the oak door several yards down on the left. When I turn the knob and enter my considerably smaller rooms, I glance only briefly around. Crookshanks saunters out of the bedroom, and I bend to scratch his head in apology for my absence as he twists and twines around my ankles.

I feel guilty leaving him, but he does fine by himself on the grounds. As testament to this, Crookshanks deserts his caressing to slip out of the door he's just noticed is open. I shut it and walk to the bathroom, wrestle a brush through my hair until it is acceptably smooth for a public outing, and then open my armoire to grab fresh clothing.

Donned in my heaviest winter robes, I just remember my nightstand before heading back to Severus' quarters.

He is thumbing through my book when I enter.

"Not Scamander's best work, but informative all the same," he says without looking up. "Shall I make myself comfortable or are you prepared to leave now?"

"Severus?" I plant myself in front of him as he rises from the couch.

"Is something amiss? I was under the impression you wanted this trip to be a quick one."

"Here."

I pull my gloved hand out of my pocket and shove the chocolate bar at him. He looks down at it abruptly, perplexed for a moment, before his attention returns to me and he finds his words.

"I frequently wonder how the child of two dentists can find so much chocolate a suitable thing. Really, Miss Granger, do you think it is appropriate to eat a whole bar at this hour? No, we shall split it." Severus pulls the bar from my hand as though it was something I'd borrowed from him and am now returning to the rightful owner. He slips it into his pocket and begins to turn toward the hearth.

"Wait, Severus. That's not all."

My grin widens when he turns and I see his own lips a little quirked.

"I've decided to stay for Christmas. You'll have me for the holiday, won't you?"

The dramatic look of impatience he sends me is softened by the mirth in his features.

"Very well. However, if you refuse to eat what the house-elves prepare for Christmas dinner, then it is only reasonable that you cook, and I shall expect something more than peaches for your imposing on me. Now come, your toddling has delayed us long enough."

It isn't really essential that he help me into the fireplace, but he does nonetheless, and I don't stop him. I also don't think it's necessary for us to Floo together, his hand still on my elbow, but I like him this close, so his hand will stay.

I know that I'm stubborn, though few people will tell me so. Mum says it all the time. She also says that people who wait around for things never get what they want. Well, I already know that, of course. My school grades would have been atrocious otherwise. I also know what Severus and I both want to happen and that he won't be the first one to pursue it. But I suppose that's why he's a Slytherin and I'm a Gryffindor.

That familiar surge of determination and resolution engulfs me like the green flames of the hearth. This is a challenge I will gladly meet, and my day looks suddenly brighter because of it.