

Reciprocity

by ayerf

Severus had reached the limits of his tolerance for a distant wife.

One-shot

Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: I am not JKR.

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Written for firefly124.

For the first week of his young wife's ongoing research, Severus Snape had been what passed for solicitous, making sure that Hermione had all of the sources she needed. He had ensured that she was eating the food the Hogwarts house-elves prepared for her, and carried her to bed when she eventually fell asleep on her work, even Vanishing the ink staining her forehead.

By the end of a fortnight of non-stop studying, Severus was fast losing patience. At the start of her marathon research leading up to her Arithmancy Mastery, Hermione had at least acknowledged his attempts to look after her, even if it was just with a distracted smile. The past few days, her nose had been perpetually buried in a book, half a dozen quills furiously scratching away at once to record her myriad trains of thought.

Towards the end of the third week, Severus had fully reverted to the snarky bastard of the height of his spying days. To his annoyance, Hermione ignored his caustic outbursts, only seeming to remember he existed when he took to appropriating the next book she had need of in the pile surrounding her. Even then, it was only to Summon the tome and send a Stinging Hex at his fingers.

On the twenty first day of Hermione's consuming research on the magical properties of complicated Muggle mathematics, Severus had reached the limits of his tolerance for a distant wife.

Growling under his breath, Severus adjusted the shower to run at a teeth-chattering temperature. He scowled down at his wilting erection. Because Hermione had been completely preoccupied with her research, his only options for the better part of a month had been enduring either a cold shower or the ministrations of his calloused hand. While he had found the occasional wank adequate before Hermione, it was an unpleasant reminder of the days when it had been his only means of release other than paying an occasional depressing visit to Meretrix Square, a red-light district not far from Knockturn Alley. For some unfathomable reason, all other women had run as fast as they could away from him. That had not been the case with men, but Severus was unquestionably heterosexual.

Standing under the shower for as long as he could bear it, Severus turned it off, shivering. A vigorous drying with a towel helped to warm him up. Stalking into the bedroom, Severus was highly tempted to dump the damp towel on the Ginger Menace curled up in a ball in the middle of the bed. But when the part-Kneazle cracked one eye open,

malevolently looking up at him, Severus thought better. Antagonising that vicious creature was a mistake at the best of times; a catastrophe in the making when lacking clothes.

In the process of dressing, Severus felt his already bad mood worsen when he discovered that his robes were plastered with cat hair. Picking up his wand from the bedside table, the temptation to hex the monster responsible was overwhelming. Seeing his wife's obnoxious familiar flex its claws threateningly, Severus hurriedly left the room, his blood boiling when a mocking mew followed him.

The few minutes that it took him to lovingly brew his first cup of coffee of the day worked to calm him down. Entering the sitting room, head bent over his cup to inhale the heavenly fragrance, he failed to notice Hermione flipping through yet another book at one of the bookshelves hiding the walls.

Sniffing at the aroma wafting around the room, Hermione distractedly drew her wand. *"Accio,"* she muttered.

One moment Severus had been about to take a sip of his morning brew, the next it was yanked out of his hand, the near-scalding liquid narrowly missing him as some of it spilled onto the floor. He watched as it flew across the room into Hermione's hands, watched as she murmured a charm to cool it down, and then drank what remained of it.

For a long moment, Severus just stood there. The only signs of the fury boiling inside him were his left eyelid twitching, and his teeth grinding together hard enough to crush granite into powder. The final straw was when he heard Hermione mumble that she would have to compliment the house-elves on the coffee.

'My coffee, and she did not even realise it! It really is as if I do not exist to her....'

He stormed over to Hermione, yanked the book out of her hands and threw it down to the floor. For the first time in over a week, she looked at him. A mixture of shock, confusion and a tinge of hurt could be seen crossing her face. She shook her head, retrieved the book and walked into her study. The door shut with a crackle of wards being erected.

'How dare she! Pilfer my coffee, then return to ignoring me the moment I had her attention.'

Breath hissing between his teeth, Severus drew his wand. All of the wards within his chambers had a backdoor built into them, but Severus was far too infuriated to use it. The door was blasted off its hinges under a barrage of curses, scattering books and notes everywhere as it smashed onto Hermione's desk.

Shrieking, Hermione threw herself out of her chair. She looked down at the bomb site her study had become, incoherent with rage. Her head lifted, her gaze meeting Severus's, who took a step back at the crazed glint in her eyes.

One flick of her wand Conjured a flock of canaries, another sent them flying at Severus. It seemed that Weasley's cautionary tale at his stag party would finally be useful.

Narrowing his eyes, Severus gestured with his wand just before the first canary reached his nose. The entire flock abruptly reversed direction. Severus felt a grim enjoyment in the priceless moment as he saw Hermione's eyes widen just before the canaries obstructed his view.

"Finite Incantatem!" she yelled above the screeching of the magical birds. They disappeared, leaving a few feathers floating to the floor. It seemed that she had managed to cancel the enchantment just in the nick of time, much to Severus's mingled disappointment and relief.

Husband and wife faced each other, wands held high, but no further spells were cast. On his part, Severus did not really want to hex Hermione. He guessed that Hermione was either similarly reluctant, or saw the folly of attacking such an experienced and talented duellist as he was.

Cautiously, Severus lowered his wand. Hermione slowly followed suit, eyeing him much like her fleabag of a familiar usually did: distrustfully with a dangerous gleam.

"What was *that* all about?" Hermione demanded, briefly looking at the detached door.

"For filching my coffee," he said, glowering at her.

She goggled at him. "You really are a monster when deprived of your morning coffee, aren't you?" She made an exasperated noise. "Don't you think that was a bit of an overreaction?"

"It was insult to injury!" Severus exclaimed. "Tell me, how much time in the duration of your research have you reserved for us?"

"Severus, you know that I have to get through this in order to qualify as an Arithmancer." Kneading at the bridge of her nose, Hermione groaned. "I can't spare any time. But I'll make it up to you afterwards, I promise!"

"What makes you think there will be an afterwards?" Severus said nastily. He regretted it as soon as he had said it, feeling the guilt as a sharp pang in his chest when Hermione flinched.

"You don't mean that," she breathed, as if trying to persuade herself of that fact.

"No, I did not." He sighed. "It was my irritation at the situation making itself felt. It is as if you did not know that I existed this past week."

Hermione stared at him, if anything even more stricken by this revelation than by the spiteful lie. By the silence, Severus imagined that she was trying to think of anything to refute it.

Her shoulders slumped. "I'm sorry. I certainly didn't mean to." She put her wand down, picked her way out of her study in order to wrap her arms around him.

Putting an arm around her, he decided to lighten the load of her obvious guilt a little. "You are not a cruel person by nature, Hermione. I am sure you did not intend to ignore me."

He felt her smile against his shoulder. "But I certainly intend to hold you to that promise." Smirking, he slid his hand down her back to cup her *derrière*, squeezing with his fingers until she stepped away from him, playfully smacking his chest.

"Deal, but only after I've completed my Mastery." She stretched up on tiptoe to kiss him. Severus followed her when she tried to pull back, deepening the kiss when she opened her mouth to protest. After a moment, she participated willingly enough, stroking her tongue against his.

She put an end to the torrid bout of kissing when his hands began to stray under her clothes, pushing on his chest to get him to step back. Before he could complain, she touched her fingers to his lips.

"Until tonight," she promised, her voice husky and eyes heavy-lidded. "The faster I finish my research, the sooner I can make it up to you."

Severus grunted, reaching down to adjust himself as she turned back to her study.

"Er, Severus? A little help sorting this mess out would be appreciated, *and* in your best interests."

Mischief managed