

Timing

by a_bees_buzz

Severus Snape wants Hermione Granger to come work at Hogwarts, but she wants more than just a job, a proposition he finds deeply disturbing.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: This story started life as a 200 word entry in the Hermione Granger Last Drabble Writer Standing competition. The challenge was to use a line from Maybe by Kelly Clarkson, and the last line of the second drabble was taken from that song.

When the war was over, the Potions master offered her an apprenticeship. "Your work preparing potions for the Order during the war has been surprisingly adequate, and you have been less insufferable than you might have been as a lab assistant in my research."

"I'm sorry, Professor. I already have plans."

She spent two years studying in Berlin.

When she returned, the new deputy Headmaster offered her an assistantship. "With the increase in student numbers due to the unfortunate closure of Durmstrang and my additional administrative duties, the school board has approved a junior Potions position. Your qualifications are acceptable."

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"I'm sorry, Professor. I've accepted another offer."

She spent five years working at St Mungo's, including three as head of the Potions Department.

When he became Headmaster, he offered her a professorship. "I would consider it a personal favour if you were to accept this offer. You are undoubtedly the most qualified candidate and would be a welcome addition to the staff."

"I'm sorry, Headmaster. I can't."

"Is there anything that could induce you to return to Hogwarts?"

"Nothing would make me happier. When the time is right."

"And when will that be?"

"When it's just because you love me."

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When it's just because you love me.

Impertinent chit. Where did she get such absurd ideas? He was not the type to fall in love.

He had been forced, in time, to admit to himself a certain admiration for the young woman in question, and her company would be a welcome addition to the staff.

Her company? Nonsense. He meant her intellect, her energy, her enthusiasm for her work. She could keep her foolish romantic notions to herself.

None of which explained the sudden lurch his heart had taken when she spoke those other words.

Nothing would make me happier.

...

"Is there something I can help you with?"

"In recent years, you have given the impression of having grown into a sensible young woman, but your recent, ludicrous comment has placed that judgment in doubt."

"Which ludicrous comment was that? I make so many."

"You know very well which one I mean. What possessed you to imply that there might be the possibility of some sort of ... emotional ... component to our interactions?"

"Why are you so adamant in insisting that there is not?"

"I want you as nothing more than a professional colleague."

"Then you will be disappointed."

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The Headmaster's office was poorly designed for pacing. He would have the house-elves remove everything but the desk and chairs in the morning. Most of it was from Albus' tenure, and he hardly needed reminding of why that meddling fool was no longer inhabiting the space. At least not corporeally.

"Ah, Severus. How was your meeting with Miss Granger? Will she be joining us here at Hogwarts?"

"If you think for one moment that I believe you've been asleep, then you have become as dull as the pigments on your canvas."

It was not fair that painted eyes could twinkle.

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After three firewhiskys, the twinkle was less objectionable. Or perhaps it was simply more difficult to discern. "Her terms are completely unacceptable."

"What has she asked for?"

"Me."

Severus was gratified to discover that a portrait could choke on a sherbet lemon. By the time the other Headmasters had collected in Albus' frame to alternately whack him about the shoulders and declaim the morals of the young, Severus had fled the castle.

Albus' response, amusing as it had been, had got him thinking. Since everything Albus had ever wanted for him had turned to his disadvantage, perhaps this bore consideration.

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The firewhisky was starting to do its magic. As he paced back and forth along the shore of the lake, he felt his thoughts becoming clearer and more focused in that mysterious way that just enough alcohol can achieve.

He knew, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that he did not love her and was not interested in loving her, or anyone else for that matter, now or ever. How dare that infuriatingly companionable woman presume he had feelings for her? In fact, he'd go and tell her just how much he didn't love her to her annoyingly interesting face.

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"I would like a word, Miss Granger."

"Certainly."

He staggered as he made his way through the door.

"Just how much have you had to drink?"

"My state of inebriation is not subject to discussion. I'm here to talk about your conditions, and I should warn you that Albus had a thing or two to say about it, himself."

"You discussed this with him?"

"It is hardly possible to avoid him when one lives at Hogwarts."

"Don't tell me he approves."

"On the contrary. He was horrified."

"Well then, that's all right. You had me worried there for a moment."

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It took several cups of tea before they could establish a clear consensus on the important points of discussion. First, that Lapsang Souchong was an infinitely superior blend to Earl Grey, particularly in the evening. Second, that Minister of Magic Kingsley Shacklebolt's latest plan to reform the tax code was entirely wrongheaded and doomed to failure. And finally, that working in an office with Albus Dumbledore looking over your shoulder was undoubtedly worse than dealing with the dunderheads who ran St Mungo's.

All in all, Severus realised, as he contemplated his empty teacup, it had been a most enjoyable evening.

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That was all he wanted. Long, enjoyable evenings of conversation. Lots of them. He saw her so rarely, with their separate lives. If she would only take a position at Hogwarts, they could have years of evenings of long, enjoyable conversations. A friendship, a meeting of minds, companionship. All the things that were missing from his life. She would be welcome to fulfill her other needs elsewhere, just as he did. In Severus's experience, sex and affection did not go together.

But that wasn't what she wanted.

"About your conditions. I believe we might be able to reach an accommodation."

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She'd agreed to his plan, with one condition. A private conversation with Albus.

"Miss Granger. How lovely to see you. You are looking well."

She began drawing large, flat, rectangular objects out of her bag and propping them up against the wall opposite the Headmaster's desk. "You needn't bother, you tiresome, meddlesome old man. I'm not here for pleasantries."

"Ah. I see that Severus has told you of my rather unfortunate reaction to your proposal. You must understand, it was quite a surprise. I fully support..."

"I'm not interested in your support. In fact, quite the opposite."

"I don't understand."

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"The Hogwarts charter guarantees you a place on these walls; I cannot prevent you from seeing Severus on a daily basis. But I will not allow you to interfere with our relationship."

"I will be happy to help in whatever way I can."

"You will do no such thing. Any time my name is mentioned or there is any hint, however subtle, of our relationship, you will look away, shake your head, and sigh deeply. Is that clear?"

"And if I do not?"

With a flick of her wand, Hermione unveiled the paintings. "Let me introduce you to modern art."

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There was a collective gasp of horror from the gallery of Headmasters' portraits. "She couldn't!" "She wouldn't." "It's not possible."

"Yes, I could. I would. And it is possible. Put one brushstroke out of line, and I will have you repainted."

The old man shook his head sadly. "I am deeply disappointed in you, Miss Granger."

"Fiddlesticks."

At that, he smiled. "You know me too well."

"The bad and the good."

"I do want the best for him, you know."

"What's best for Severus is for you to stay right out of it and let him find his own way."

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What had he been thinking? Convincing the current Potions professor to stay on another term hadn't been difficult. If all went according to plan, Hermione would take up the position in January. It was the bit in between that was giving him hives.

Dating.

On the up side, they would have regular conversations without the constant interruptions by dunderheads that were the hallmark of most of their recent encounters. For some reason, people at social events expected one to be sociable, when he only went to see her. He could admit that now. To himself, anyway.

Still. Dating. He shuddered.

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He worried about the possibility of primping. He hated it when women primed. Not that he'd ever actually watched the priming process, but he hated the results. All that paint, just to hide their true faces. He'd had enough of masks for one lifetime. And fussy clothes. Hermione had never seemed like much of a primper, but then, he'd never seen her on a date. He vaguely recalled that she might have primed once or twice in her student days, but he wouldn't hold that against her. He'd made a poor choice or two in his own youth, after all.

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Would she expect a kiss goodnight? It was customary after a date. Humiliating images of nervous fumbling on doorsteps flashed before him.

"This is ridiculous," he muttered and knocked on her door.

She was perfect. No painted, trussed-up trollop. Just Hermione.

"Before we start this ... date ... I should point out that I am not a traditional man. I will not be bound by customary practice."

"I see. No, actually, I don't. What do you mean?"

"I mean," he said crossing the room, "that I have no intention of waiting until the end of the evening to kiss you."

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Severus was snogging. There was no other word for it. Having expended so much effort in breaking up snogging couples while prowling the halls of Hogwarts late at night,

he had long ago developed a deep disdain for the practice. All that messy saliva and awkward manoeuvring of noses. His previous physical encounters involved the bare minimum of lip contact. He was careful not to avoid it entirely, which would have given the impression that the act was entirely impersonal, but it was something he endured rather than enjoyed. This was different. He was snogging Hermione. It was entirely wonderful.

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The food may have been good. Undoubtedly the story she was relating was not only interesting, but told with appropriate lashings of sarcasm and incisive wit. All her stories were. But he was having trouble concentrating on anything besides the way her lips moved as she spoke. He waited impatiently for dinner to end so he could try snogging them some more. Somewhere in the back of his brain the snide, supercilious, sneering Potions master was screaming that he was acting like a besotted fool, but he couldn't find it in him to care. There would be more snogging. Soon.

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He barely let the door close behind him before taking her in his arms again. Astonishingly, after-dinner snogging was even better than before-dinner snogging. For one thing, there weren't any pesky restaurant reservations to worry about, so the snogging could go on as long as he liked. Forever sounded good.

A whimper of frustration escaped her at the loss of contact before she opened her eyes to find him glaring at her.

"How did you know?"

"What?"

"That I loved you?"

"I only knew I couldn't settle for anything less."

Snogging Hermione was indescribably wonderful. Kissing Hermione was even better.

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A/N: Readers may feel free to assume that Tab A was inserted into Slot B and that the owners of both slot and tab were pleased with the outcome. And that Hermione took the job at Hogwarts.