

Odyssey

by Lorraine Bluestar

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Hermione had never been so tempted to cancel a date and just spend her evening huddling under a warm blanket with a good book and a cup of coffee. Her day at work had been tiresome and, to be completely honest, utterly boring. When she'd decided to pursue a career in Magical Law Enforcement, she'd never expected to start her duties dusting and ordering the files of the older cases. It was obvious no one had done that in ages, considering she came up with a file pertaining a scandalous case about a wizard locking up and starving his Squib daughter back in 1927. It would have been very enlightening to read all those old cases and learning how Wizarding Law had changed through the years, but her boss kept on rushing her with the order of the files and saying she still wasn't ready to start getting involved with cases. While it was refreshing to work with a man who was not impressed to have a war hero working in his department and the so called brightest witch of her age, it was annoying to be treated as a little girl who didn't have idea of what she was doing.

Mr. Twynam liked to do things his way, and with 118 years of age, he was sure of his ability to judge the capacities of his subordinates with just a glance, and to him, Hermione Granger was nothing more than a novice with only twenty-six years of age and no practical experience with laws. She knew that it was only a matter of time before she could show Twynam her real worth, and she was eager to prove herself and start working to improve the law system in order to eradicate the obsolete pureblood laws. It annoyed her and made her feel anxious to do things in Twynam's way because she knew she was already ready for the task, and she was sure soon she'd be in the courts and not up on a ladder dusting old files that still she wasn't even allowed to read. It was so tempting to ignore her boss and take the steps she knew she could, but for now she'd be patient and follow his ridiculous rules; after all, she wasn't a teenager anymore, and years had given her some restraint in her way of doing what was better for herself and for the rest.

If her hard work in the file room hadn't been enough to make her day terrible, the rain that started when she was walking to her flat made things worse. Hermione had foolishly decided to stop by the grocery store on her way home to buy milk, and when she was walking back to her flat, she got caught in the rain. She lived in a Muggle area, which made it impossible for her to just Apparate home and avoid the rain, so she reached her home soaking and with her back aching. She had promised Viktor that they would have dinner after work, but she was in a terrible mood and didn't feel like leaving her flat again and venturing into the streets of London. Both preferred to spend time in Muggle London in order to avoid the gossip that followed famous people and that always annoyed them so much. After Voldemort had been vanquished, her name, along with Ron's, became almost as famous as Harry's, and they were again in the spotlight as war heroes, and to her annoyance it turned out that as Rita Skeeter usually said, everybody loved a hero. The fact that it was also the time when she'd started dating Ron hadn't helped them because many people wanting to have something besides the war to focus their attention on, and a budding romance between two war heroes was a worthy enough distraction. Somehow stories about their time at Hogwarts started, and everyone talked about the two friends that were meant to be together after all they had been gone through, and speculation about their future together started.

It had been overwhelming to receive all that attention, having their pictures frequently in the *Daily Prophet*, having people asking when they'd get married or how many children they'd wanted to have. It was ridiculous, of course, as they were only eighteen years old and had a long life ahead. Besides, they'd just started dating and had to work out how to work as a couple and not just as friends. Hermione had hated the gossip and would have happily hexed some people for meddling in her personal life, but thankfully Ron had known her well and known how to deal with her and make her relax when it was needed, and it was obvious that there had been an undeniable

attraction between them and that they'd loved each other despite their flaws. They had everything needed to be happy, and he had been everything that she had wanted, but as the years passed, both had changed and started growing in different directions until they broke up amicably after being together three years. Of course the entire Wizarding British community knew about it, and it became gossip quite quickly no matter how much they had wanted to keep it secret.

Almost two years after their break up, Ron had begun dating Hilary Paddick, a Holyhead Harpies player with whom Ginny had set him up, and it seemed that they were quite serious and already talking about marriage. On the other hand, Hermione was still single and not at all interested in dating anyone she knew, not that they were asking her out anyway. Her work in the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures had finally been showing a real advance in the improvement of the life for house-elves, and she had really focused on the work that she still had to do for them. However, no matter how much she'd refused to accept it, her focus on her job had also been a very well designed façade to keep her from thinking about the fear she felt about finding someone else and failing again. If the relationship with Ron hadn't worked out even when they'd had everything on their side to make it work, what would stop another relationship from ending in the same way? Hermione hated failures and not being good at something, and whatever caused it wasn't something she wanted in her life. That included relationships, which she started avoiding altogether.

When Viktor had owled her to ask her for dinner during his next trip to London, she'd accepted without second thoughts, it wasn't a date after all. He had been her friend for almost ten years after all and had always been there one way or another. He'd even gone to see her when the war had been over to be sure she was indeed fine, and when she'd confirmed her relationship with Ron, he'd left with a smile that hadn't quite reached his eyes and had wished her luck and reminded her that he'd always keep an eye on her. He'd kept his promise and stayed present in her life, owling her from time to time to catch up with their lives and projects. After that dinner came several more, along with brunch during weekends followed by long walks in the country, and the occasional trip to Diagon Alley to visit Flourish and Blotts.

Five months later, after a lovely dinner, he'd kissed her before Flooing home from her flat, and Hermione had felt as if time had stopped in that same moment. It wasn't too different from the kiss he'd given her after the Yule Ball or before he'd left Hogwarts, but the feelings she'd experienced were certainly very different from those she'd had at fifteen. His kiss had awakened her senses and her emotions, and she'd been faced with the truth: she loved Viktor. She had always thought that the proverbial butterflies in the stomach and the feeling of floating were just metaphors, a useful literary device to make kissing beautiful and appealing for the readers, but in that same moment, she'd known both were very real. Their kissing had deepened, and Viktor hadn't Flooed home but stayed for the night. When Hermione had woken up the next morning in his arms, feeling his warm skin against her cooler flesh, she'd felt so complete, so alive, that she'd known there wasn't any other place in the world where she wanted to be or any other man to have her in his embrace. She'd traced his crooked nose, his lips, his jaw with her fingers and marvelled at the peace his face showed when he wasn't hiding behind his scowl or his defences from the world that didn't know him, and knowing she was the cause of that peace was just overwhelming. When he'd awakened, no words were needed when he'd kissed her, and when they'd started all over again, she knew she had never felt so full in every sense of the word.

From that point they were officially dating, and Hermione forgot her fears about failing, instinctively knowing Viktor would never let her fail. It amazed her the way he made her feel secure in a way Ron had never achieved and how much she felt capable of with him by her side. He was very supportive of her career and her decisions, and when she'd been considering her transfer to the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, he'd been there to listen to her rambling, sitting quietly while she paced in the living room of her flat, giving her time to analyse the situation and cuddling her when she'd felt too tired to think about it. Viktor was still playing Quidditch with the Vrastra Vultures as everyone had expected since the World Cup in 1994 during his last year in Durmstrang, but was considering an early retirement after a hard fall from a broom that left him out of his third World Cup. The Montrose Magpies had already expressed their interest in having him as a coach, so he would probably move to England.

She was still remembering how they'd started their relationship when she heard the Floo activate and turned quickly to find Viktor standing by the fireplace removing Floo powder from his cloak.

"You're early tonight," Hermione told him as he joined her on the couch and kissed her in the passionate way that always managed to leave her breathless.

"Good night to you, too, my luff," he said, brushing his fingers tenderly over her cheek. He grinned mischievously as he moved her closer to snuggle. "I know I am early, but I wanted to make early appearance because I haff surprise for you."

Hermione frowned at his words; he knew she didn't enjoy surprises, and he knew better than doing something to make her feel uncomfortable. "Viktor, you know I don't like surprises. Besides, tonight I'm not in the mood."

"I can see you had bad day in Ministry. You can tell me vy this vos bad day. I know it helps you ven you tell how day vos and start saying boss acts... vot is vord you use vith boss?"

It was still difficult for Viktor to understand all the words she said and to remember each of them, so Hermione often had to remind him how to say things and communicate in English. Contrary to the brooding and quiet image he always gave to the rest of the world, she knew he enjoyed talking and improving his vocabulary, but that was one facet of his personality that few people knew. Although it amused her how fast he grasped the cursing and some dirty words he used when they were in bed, not that she'd ever let him know that.

"I guess you mean when I say Twynam acts preposterously."

"Yes, that is vord you use vith boss. Did boss do something pre--prespo--preps--" Viktor ran his fingers through his short, dark hair in obvious exasperation over not being able to say a word he had just heard.

Hermione smiled and snuggled closer to him, inhaling his scent and feeling that sense of security she always felt in his arms. It might be clichéd to feel that way, and too girlish for her taste, but she couldn't help feeling that way in his embrace. "He did. He made me clean and organise dozens of old files and didn't let me read them. It infuriates me the way he treats me as if I were just a silly girl that has no idea what she's doing, and the patronising tone he uses with me, I swear I could..." But the words died in her mouth when he tightened his embrace in a reassuring way that calmed her in a way words never managed to achieve.

"Is fine, Hermyonnee. Ve should forget about boss and go to dinner, is getting late." He moved to stand up, but she refused to move from the couch.

"Do we have to? I had an awful day in the office, and it's pouring outside. I think we should stay here and cuddle under the blankets. I can call the Chinese place and order the take out you like."

Viktor blinked at her and frowned. Despite the fact that it was usually hard to decipher his reactions, it was obvious to Hermione that he was disappointed and probably looking for the words to express that.

"Ve haff to go to dinner; ve had plans to go out tonight."

"Well, we can change them for this time and go during the weekend or next week. I really want to stay here for the night and enjoy some time with my boyfriend."

"But tonight is different, Hermyonnee, dinner vill be special. I said I haff surprise for you."

"Really? The surprise you don't want to tell me about. Why don't you just tell me what is so special?"

"I--I managed to get reservations in Italian place you like so much."

"Oh." Viktor always did those amazing things that made her feel cherished, and it melted her heart every time he did, but this time she was really exhausted after spending all day on a bloody ladder ordering dusty files. "Viktor, don't you think we can change our plans? I'm really exhausted."

"But reservation is ready; they expect us in few minutes. Ve need to go."

Hermione finally rose from the couch and walked to pick up the telephone that was on the table beside the perch. "Well, nothing that can't be arranged with a phone call." She started dialling the number of the restaurant when she felt his hand removing the phone from hers.

"Hermyonnee, do not do this. Ve need to go, haff to go." He was pacing now, obviously not happy with the way things were happening and trying find a way to make her go

out.

"Why is this so important for you? Why don't you just tell me the reasons so I can understand you?" When he was like that, unable to express himself, she couldn't help to be angry at his inability to speak.

He was desperate; that was obvious, his hands fisted by his sides while he tried to find a way out of his dilemma. "It was not supposed to be like this. You had to accept dinner, and we would drink wine, and enjoy the pasta and the bread you love so much before I give you news."

"News? Viktor, what do you want to tell me? Is this about the job with the Montrose Magpies?" Hermione was starting to feel excited. Viktor had just been waiting for their final offer to decide if he wanted to retire from the league. Despite the fact that they didn't have too many problems with him living in Bulgaria due to the possibilities that Floo and Apparition gave them, they had talked about moving in together if he came to England. She had analysed the prospect of living with Viktor since he'd mentioned the idea, and after half a dozen lists, she'd realised that she just knew she was ready to be with him. Her decision had nothing to do with all her lists; it was a certainty that had come naturally for her, straight from her heart.

Viktor bit his lip and shook his head. That wasn't the way he'd wanted things to develop, but it was inevitable now. "They owed me to request meeting today, and they showed plan for me as coach for next five years. It is good offer, they pay very well, and will allow me to do things my way. I think I can move here next week."

"Oh my God, that's amazing, Viktor, just what we were expecting," she said as she clung to his neck, forgetting about his lack of fondness for physical displays of affection.

"Hermione, that is not all I want to say."

She let go of him when she heard the uncertainty in his voice. Viktor was certainly the quiet type and had never been conceited, but there was a self assurance in him that made him appear so sure of his place in the world. Hearing him sound insecure was odd and not a good sign.

"What's wrong? Is there something you haven't told me? Because if it's about the dinner you had planned, I think you are just overreacting..."

"No, it is not about dinner. I just--I want to talk about something else." He started pacing again, probably looking for the right words to express himself. "This is very hard, more than I expected. I do not know how to say things."

Hermione reached for him and placed her hand gently over his arm to reassure him. "Why don't you just tell me what you are thinking? You don't need to make it sound perfect." He looked at her in the eyes, and she could see the turmoil of emotions in the darkness of his gaze.

Viktor breathed deeply and started talking. "Since first night I saw you in Hogwarts, I knew you were special. There was spark in your eyes that no other girl had. I spent hours in library fighting to gather courage and ask you to ball, and when you said yes, I was happier than ever in my life. You looked so beautiful in blue dress, and I was proud because I knew I had most beautiful girl in ball and she was also the most smart one. Since we were so young, I saw how special you are, and I vowed I would fight for you. When you told me about war and about having to go with Potter, I feared for you, and I was scared about losing you forever, but when I knew you were fine after war, I was so happy you were safe I accepted my defeat when I saw you with Weasley. I preferred to see you happy."

He paused to put his thoughts together before carrying on, and his words were so full of emotion that a knot formed in Hermione's throat and prevented her from interrupting his declaration.

"Years had to pass before I had chance to see you again and start fighting, but the wound in your heart was so, how you say it, so recent? I was friend, waited for you to be ready for me, and when you were, you made me most happy man in world. You are most amazing woman. You are different from rest, most clever than anyone I know, you have beautiful face but more beautiful heart. I have never felt like this for any woman, and I know I never will. I want to be with you when you come home and hear you rant about boss being that word I cannot say. I want to wake up every morning with you in my arms, to feel your body tremble against mine when we make love. I want to spend my life with you and get old together."

Tears were already running down Hermione's cheeks when he knelt and held her hand between his. "Would you accept to share your life with me, Hermione? Would you make me the honour of becoming my wife?"

Hermione fell to her knees and joined him on the floor, kissing him silly and saying yes many times before he brought her down to sit on his lap and silenced her with a deep kiss that awakened her senses and made her skin burn. In that moment nothing else in the world mattered but the man holding her tightly and kissing her in the way she was sure kissing must be done. She needed him so much that she started rocking against him, one hand tangled in his hair while the other explored his chest. It was Viktor who regained some control of the situation and calmed down to finish their talk.

"I am sorry I have no ring for you. Ring is in Italian restaurant waiting for us with bottle of wine and food you like so much. Now that it seems we have missed dinner, I wonder if you want to go and reconsider it."

For once Hermione didn't mind the logical option that was going for the ring and not risk losing it. She lifted hand and kissed the palm tenderly before speaking her mind. "The ring can wait until tomorrow, for all I want, and I will ever need, is right here with me."

Viktor smiled in that way that was reserved only for her and kissed her forehead before helping her to stand up. "I love you, Hermione. It took me a dozen years to have you with me forever, but I have always known you are worth fighting a thousand years for."

She only smiled because words were not necessary and led the way to the bedroom. With a whispered spell, the light of the candles dimmed while they started the rest of their lives in the only way it should be, loving each other.

Lorraine's Notes: This fic was written originally for my friend Inell during the sexy_brilliance exchange in LJ.

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