

# One More

*by a\_bees\_buzz*

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*Chapter 1 of 1*

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One more day. That was all. Just one more day of her seemingly endless apprenticeship. She'd known it would be hard work. She'd been warned he'd be a harsh taskmaster. There had been no surprises. One more day, and she'd be done.

Of course she'd had her fantasies, didn't every apprentice? She had dreamt that she'd manage to impress him with her intelligence and aptitude, and make him recognize her as a person of worth. Not just an annoying addition to his admittedly onerous teaching schedule or a help in the lab, but someone of worth in her own right.

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One more day. That was all. Just one more day before he was freed of the albatross of unmeetable expectations. He never should have been trusted with her dreams; it was eminently unfair, both to himself and to her. More than that, it was an impossible situation. At least, it had been made so.

He would never forgive Albus for that particular bit of meddling. Death had rendered the old codger no less sly or observant. Even as a portrait, he'd seen what Severus had not and collected the Potions master's oath long before Severus had known it was needed.

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One more afternoon. That was all. The morning had passed, lunch had been unremarkable, she had only to make it through until dinner time to be free of her servitude.

How had it become such a burden? At the start, she had wanted nothing more than to learn, to immerse herself in the vast ocean of his knowledge. He had given her that. Oh yes, she could not deny his generosity in the realms of ideas and facts; he had never stinted her there. On the contrary, it had been a time of rapturous intellectual indulgence. Why wasn't that enough?

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One more afternoon. That was all. Then he could return to his solitary existence, untroubled by his failures. In particular, the one that troubled him most: the failure to recognize what he gave up when he acceded to Albus' request that he "not intrude into her personal life". It had sounded so reasonable at the time. But as her personal issues had seen her buffeted by the treacherous wiles of one dunderhead after another, he had deeply rued her inability to properly appreciate her own worth. She was so ... young. So foolish, in ways that were so bitterly familiar.

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One more hour. That was all. Her time was nearly done. No more chances to prove herself. No more insights to bring to him as poor, pathetic gifts, hoping that this time he would see in them something worthy of his notice. No more hours in the lab listening to his eloquent descriptions of the great debates of the field and his insightful commentary into the strengths and weaknesses of different theoretical approaches. No more late nights, sharing the tension of hope and the glory or despair as a new formulation was tested.

A tear slipped unnoticed down her cheek.

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One more hour. That was all. One more hour before ... blast and damn! A tear. Bloody Albus and his bloody oaths! No man should ever have to stand by and watch a woman he cares for shed tears before him without responding. It was inhuman. And yet, he watched her closely as she stirred and chopped and diced. The last potion she would brew in his lab. It wasn't her technique he had watched all these months, but the way her hands moved. She had an extraordinary talent. He could have taught her so much more, if only ...

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One more minute. That was all. Shouldn't she be dancing with joy? Freedom and certification in one short moment. And yet, for everything she'd gained, there was so much more that she had wanted. She would gladly trade another year or two of servitude for any indication that she had been more than a balancing of the inconvenience to his schedule with her assistance in his lab.

She knew that wasn't fair. He had gone far beyond the traditional curriculum for an apprentice in potions, teaching her experimental techniques and abstruse theory. But always, it seemed, to his own agenda.

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One more minute. The seconds ticked by with excruciating slowness. Another opportunity lost in a lifetime of lost opportunities. He would see her again, no doubt, at public functions where they would exchange polite greetings. Maybe even in the occasional apothecaries, where they might quarrel over the freshness of the ingredients in the bins, or just nod and move on. He'd had enough.

"Finish up, Miss Granger. Tidy your space and be gone."

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"Professor Snape? I'm leaving now. I just ... I wanted to thank you."

"For what?"

"I'm not sure. It wasn't what I'd hoped, or even what I expected, but I've learnt a tremendous amount from you these past two years. More than ... well, more than just potions. So, thank you."

"Come with me." He led her past the gargoyle and up the spiral stairs, then gestured her to a comfortable chair. "You are owed an explanation," he said. "Do not leave until you have it."

He left her then and waited in the hallway, unsure of what would transpire.

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"I wish I'd known."

"It would have been for naught if you had."

"Does that mean he was right?"

"When have you ever known Albus Dumbledore to be right?" he sneered and waited.

When she snickered, he knew hope. "He did know about the Horcruxes."

"And?"

"He thought Harry had to die."

"Which tells you?"

"He's generally half right."

"Precisely."

"The question is, which half? Do you know?"

"No ... not for certain."

"Are you interested in finding out?"

Severus drew himself up. "I am always interested in furthering my knowledge."

"Shall we call it research then?"

"Indeed we shall."