

A Working Relationship

by selened

Professor Dumbledore has decided Snape needs an assistant... whether he likes it or not.

The Arrangement

Chapter 1 of 2

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The Arrangement

"Severus! It's no good you carrying on protesting. My mind is quite made up. You are to have an assistant."

"Headmaster..."

Albus held up his hand. "Stop fighting it, Severus. You're wasting your breath. I have heard both of your points several times over. You feel that an assistant would be under your feet and that you would be inconvenienced and endangered by working so closely with someone else. These are valid points, my boy, and I have taken them into consideration whilst making my choice."

"You've already chosen someone?" he replied, in an outraged tone.

"Indeed I have. She is going to work part time in the evenings and at weekends and you may delegate responsibilities as you think best. I would suggest you allow her to grade papers for the Lower School and perhaps brew potions for the Infirmary. That will give more time to concentrate on your research and to answer Voldemort if he calls you in the evenings."

"How do you suggest I keep my comings and goings a secret with some curious female haunting my lab?"

"You need have no secrets from Hermione, Severus. She is well aware of your role in this conflict as are all key members of the Order."

"Tell me you don't mean Hermione Granger!" he said in horror.

"Of course I mean Miss Granger, Severus. She's the obvious choice. She is more than competent enough to brew basic Infirmary potions and do any other odd jobs for you."

"We don't get on. She'll have me as a captive audience trapped in here night after night. She'll drive me mad with all her questions."

"Severus, you can't continue to judge the girl on what she was like as an eleven year old. She's a young woman now and the most promising academic mind to come through Hogwarts since you were a student here."

"She has a good memory; I'll give her that much."

"If you paid proper attention to her you would see that there's a great deal more to her than that."

Severus grunted. Albus resisted the urge to laugh at him.

"Severus! I simply cannot allow you to carry on burning the candle at both ends in the way you have been. You're tired and you're irritable and you are increasing the pressure on yourself by your stubbornness. You cannot carry on like this. You are too important to me for me to allow it."

"I can manage," he protested.

"No, Severus, you can't. You are a powerful wizard but I don't want you going to Voldemort when you're too exhausted to keep him out of your head. You put yourself in great danger for us and you do so without complaint. I will do all I can to keep you safe, whether you like it or not. All I will ask is that you treat Miss Granger with the same degree of respect you would reserve for any other competent colleague."

"She's a child... What about her exams?"

"She's the oldest seventh year, Severus. She came of age a full year ago now and she has agreed to defer her exams if necessary. She will continue to sit in on classes during the day so as not to arouse suspicion. I'm just asking you not to try to intimidate her in the way you do your students. She will come down here and get on with her work in a professional manner and you will treat her accordingly. Do I make myself clear?"

"As crystal, Headmaster. When is my torture to begin?"

"Miss Granger will be joining us any minute... in fact I think I hear her footsteps now."

A knock sounded at the door.

"Come in," called Severus irritably.

The door opened and Hermione stepped inside.

"Good evening, sir, Professor Dumbledore..."

"Good evening, Hermione," said Dumbledore warmly. "I was just filling Professor Snape in on the details of this new arrangement. I'm sure that you are going to be a great help to him."

"I hope so, sir," said Hermione eagerly.

Snape snorted.

"Isn't that so, Severus?" said Dumbledore.

"Yes," replied Snape shortly.

"Well I'll leave you two alone to discuss the finer points of the matter. Hermione, I'd like you to come and see me afterwards if that will be convenient."

"Yes, Professor, thank you."

Dumbledore left the room quickly, leaving Snape and Hermione standing at some distance from each other.

There was an uncomfortably long pause. Eventually Hermione broke it.

"Thank-you for agreeing to let me work with you," she said politely.

"I didn't agree to anything," said Snape brusquely. "My wishes have not been taken into account at all."

"I'm sorry about that," said Hermione awkwardly. "Nevertheless I hope you will find the arrangement helpful once we've worked out the details."

"I hold little hope of that. However I accept that in this matter I am bound to accept the judgment of the Headmaster."

"What will you be wanting me to do?"

"First and foremost, Miss Granger, I will be wanting you to keep your mouth shut. I cannot abide useless chatter and I will not be interrupted in my work."

"No, sir, I can respect that. Professor Dumbledore said you were working on something really important. Something that might help Harry when he has to fight Voldemort."

"That is correct. If I am to be successful in my endeavour I need plenty of time and space in which to work."

"I understand. I'll do some of the mundane stuff for you so you have time and I promise I'll be as quiet as a mouse. You won't realise I'm in the room. I take it we'll work in here?"

"I'm not sure that would be wise. This room is not exactly private and I can hardly pretend you're here on detention every night and all weekend. Neither would it be a good idea to ward myself inside with you. I view you as a child but there are others who seem to think you would pass as a woman, so it would give rise to gossip if we are seen to be seeking privacy. The same holds true for my office. I have a private lab, which can only be accessed through my own quarters. I will need to work in there. You may sit in the room alongside to mark and I'll put in a spare bench in the corner for you to use to brew for Poppy."

"So that's what I'll be doing? Marking work and brewing for the Infirmary."

"Yes. While you're doing that I will research and experiment undisturbed. I'll need to charm a Dicto-quill to reproduce my handwriting so no one knows you are doing the marking. I trust you are sufficiently acquainted with my character to produce convincing comments for the essays?"

"I don't think I'll have a problem," she said dryly.

"That's settled then. We'll start tomorrow."

"How will I get to your quarters? I don't even know where they are."

"There is a hidden door in here. I will show you how to use it tomorrow. As I have nothing set aside for you this evening I suggest you go and catch up with the Headmaster to reassure him that I am capable of behaving myself. You may stay behind after last period tomorrow. I take it Potter and Weasley know about this?"

"I haven't told them yet. I was planning to say that I was spending time helping Madam Pomfrey and Professor McGonagall."

"You were planning to deceive them. Why?"

"They would make a fuss if they knew I was helping you and they'd keep trying to persuade me to have time off to watch Quidditch practices. It's just easier for me to pretend to be doing things they won't question."

"As you wish. I will see you tomorrow. You are dismissed."

Hermione made a move towards the door. As she got there she turned and said, "Goodnight, sir and thank you."

"Goodnight, Miss Granger."

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"How was he after I left?" asked the Headmaster.

"He was fairly reasonable considering. I mean you can tell he's not happy about the prospect of having to do his work with me around but he wasn't too nasty about it."

"I suppose 'not too nasty' is the best we can hope for at the moment. Please try and stick with him. This work he's doing could be the key to everything and I would be a fool to allow him to waste his time marking first year essays. He has to teach to maintain his cover, but I want to relieve him of as much as I can."

"I understand. I'll keep out of his way as much as I can."

"It is my hope that he will eventually allow you to help with the research."

"Oh but... I mean Professor Snape is practically a genius.... I couldn't possibly..."

"You have great potential in this field, Hermione. You are correct about Severus being a genius, but I am not convinced he cannot benefit from having someone he trusts to share his research with. Work with him, Hermione. It will take time but if he opens up to you at all, let him. At the very least his life will be easier for it. In a more unhappy scenario, he plays a dangerous game as a spy. If something were to happen to him it would be helpful for us to be able to understand his work and his thinking."

"I'll do my best, sir, I promise."

"That is all any of us can do."

Settling Down

Chapter 2 of 2

Severus and Hermione need to adapt to their arrangement.

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Settling Down

Severus stirred his cauldron carefully. This new creation was the most complex yet known to wizardkind. A truly new creation, it was not yet perfected, not yet good enough. Forty three separate ingredients and counting. At this stage even the speed of the stirring was significant.

Hermione sat in the adjoining room. Her work was long completed and she had sat for two solid hours watching through the half open door as Snape carried out his tasks. She told herself that she had little choice in the matter. She could not leave his quarters without an escort at this hour. Curfew was strictly enforced these days after all. Whilst this was perfectly true, it was also true that she did not mind being an observer, even at this late hour. What Snape was doing was utterly fascinating. She had never seen anything like this before. What things this man could teach if he were so minded! The most complex thing she had ever brewed was the Polyjuice potion back in her second year. That was far more complicated than anything on the Hogwarts syllabus, even under Snape's exacting jurisdiction. Even the potions she had taken to brewing for the Infirmary in recent months were relatively simple, if occasionally more volatile.

It had now been a little over a month since Dumbledore had prompted their working arrangement and they had both fallen into the pattern much more easily than might have been predicted. They were rarely in the same room at the same time. Hermione marked parchments in imitation of his style in his sitting room while he brewed in the lab and Hermione used the lab when he was engrossed in calculations for his potion or impatiently scratching at the Sixth and Seventh year's meagre offerings. Usually just before midnight she would be dismissed and make her own way back to her room. In the event she was kept later Snape would grab his cloak and accompany her to a point within sight of the Gryffindor staircase and wait until she was safely inside. Hardly a word passed between them.

Hardly a word, but many a glance!

Severus would be conscious of the gentle hum of her voice as she instructed the Dicto-quill. He was accustomed to looking up and realising he was not alone in the way that he was used to. He wasn't quite ready to acknowledge that Dumbledore had been right. Perish the thought! However it had to be said that the child... woman... however you wished to see her, had been a great help. He no longer had to limp through dozens and dozens of pieces of written work. He would watch her sometimes as she visibly struggled to read something a particularly inept child had written. Exasperation at stupidity or lack of effort could be read on her overly expressive face. He chewed on the inside of his mouth at the thought that the girl was much too bright to find satisfaction dealing with dunderheads in her adult life. If she ever were allowed to have one of course. The pressure was mounting. The final conflict could not be far away. The futures of young women such as this one were in doubt and in danger. He would shake his head as he turned back to his work.

Hermione in her turn would let his movements catch her eye. Every time he added something to the potion she would try to think what it might be. Of course she couldn't openly watch him but over time the rhythm of his potion building had impressed itself on her analytical brain. Tonight he had managed to get further along than she had yet seen. He had been on his feet for more than seven hours now working this particular ritual. Every so often he would stoop to amend his notes. Hermione conjectured what he might be recording. After so long on his feet over a cauldron on the heat he would make concessions with his clothing. First he would undo the top two buttons of his waistcoat. Next the white cravat would be loosened. Eventually he would even go so far as to remove his frock coat. Tonight even that had not stopped him feeling the effects of the heat. Hermione could see the beads of sweat growing on his forehead even from a distance. He kept raking his hair back out of his eyes and Hermione wondered why he didn't simply tie it back as she had to in class.

Her eyes began to close with her fatigue but she was startled awake as she heard Snape yell "FUCK!" at the top of his voice followed a split second later by the sound of

the cauldron hitting the floor with a clatter.

He jumped back nimbly to avoid the spilt contents of the cauldron as they spread towards him. At a safe distance he muttered "*Evanesco*," and the laboured over potion vanished into thin air. He sank down onto the nearby stool and buried his face in his hands, massaging the skin of his forehead with his fingertips.

Hermione rose to her feet and crept quietly to stand in the doorway. She didn't like to disturb him but it was now 2.30am and they both had a full day ahead of them tomorrow. If he didn't need his sleep, she certainly needed hers.

"Are you all right, sir?" she tendered.

He looked up startled. "Miss Granger. I had forgotten you were still here. I was distracted by my work... I apologise."

"I come down here so that you can be distracted by your work. You don't have to apologise... You didn't answer my question. I asked if you were all right."

He looked at her with an unreadable expression.

"I was careless. Tonight I had revised my calculations and I was able to get past the sticking point that has been troubling me for the past eight days. I was in hope that I might prove something to myself but as I said I was careless. I allowed a drop of my own sweat to taint my mixture. It's very sensitive and the damage was total. Hence my outburst."

"You'll be able to try again tomorrow won't you? I mean you've still made an advance tonight."

"I will work again tomorrow night. However some of these ingredients are extremely difficult to come by and my advance has led me to waste quantities which will be exceedingly hard to replace."

"I see. Professor.... Can I ask what you're working on?"

"You seem to have done so already."

His face shut down a little and he rose to his feet.

"I told the Headmaster I'd be forever fending off your questions if I allowed you to work with me. I will escort you back to Gryffindor Tower."

"How dare you!" she exclaimed.

"What did you say to me?" he enquired in disbelief.

"You heard me. I said, 'How dare you!'"

"And what did you mean by that?"

"I have not asked a single question or engaged in any conversation with you all the time we've been working down here and just for a moment when I'm worried about you and we start to talk you start treating me like an irritating little girl who does nothing but annoy! I've worked very hard for you and I deserve better."

"Do you indeed? Well I suppose that may be true. However very few of us will get what we deserve in this life. There is no unifying force in this world that will ensure we are treated according to our merits. Believe me, you are better off not knowing what it is I seek to do and if you cannot deal with that then you may go and see the Headmaster and asked to be relieved of your duties."

"I can't do that," she said, appalled.

"And why is that?"

"Because I know that the work you do is important. I have to do something to help in this war and not everyone could do what I've been doing for you. Whatever your potion is Professor Dumbledore wants it and I'm not going to go to him and say I can't assist you because my feelings are hurt."

"You are so much a Gryffindor it's really quite amusing," he said almost smiling. "At first I was surprised you weren't in Ravenclaw because you really are very intelligent but you don't know how to use that brain of yours for your own benefit."

"And if I were a Ravenclaw or, God forbid, a Slytherin, I would be different. Is that it?" Had that been veiled praise or more backhand than compliment?

"Very different. It's late. Pick up your things. I will take you up to Gryffindor Tower so we can both get some rest. I would advise you to have a lie in tomorrow morning."

"Are you going to?"

"No. I have classes."

"So do I."

"As I said, very Gryffindor. Let's go."

They walked together through the deserted halls in complete silence. Snape stopped at the end of the corridor and watched as she went on alone. He could hear the disgruntled voice of the Fat Lady who was not happy to have been woken up at this hour. Hermione disappeared into the doorway and he gathered his robe around him tightly and stalked away.

Hermione trudged wearily up the staircase. She had been given a spare room to herself at the top of the Tower since she started working with Professor Snape and at moments such as this it was welcome. There was no way she could have got away with these late nights under the vigilance of her former dorm-mates. Their open jealousy at what was viewed as favouritism had served to create even more distance in the relationship between her and them. She opened the door and dropped quickly down onto her large welcoming four poster bed. She was asleep, still fully dressed, in seconds. If any ghosts of Severus Snape made their way into her dreams she had no close girl friends to tell.