

Takeover Bid: A Tale of the Marriage Law

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One

Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: Anything recognisable from the Potterverse is not mine it all belongs to JKR, Warners, or whoever officially owns it. The story, however, is mine. I write fanfic for pleasure and not for money, so there.

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Severus Snape arrived home wondering what awaited him. Admittedly, it could be nothing good, and equally admittedly, it had already been aggravating enough to have to return to the Ministry and ask where 'home' might be, but given the other events of the day, it was likely to be something more than moderately unpleasant.

His plans had been laid. He had put everything in place. Then the letter from the Ministry had arrived: a summons to discuss his marital situation, as he had not yet seen fit to fulfil the terms of the Marriage Decree. There were still three weeks to the deadline, so without much trepidation he dutifully arrived at the Ministry at the appointed time, his story well-rehearsed.

The first indication of trouble was when his wand was not immediately returned after weighing-in at the entry desk. The second was when it was handed to a waiting Auror, who indicated that Snape was to follow him into the bowels of the Ministry.

They arrived at a featureless door, which opened to reveal the Junior Sub-Undersecretary for Wizarding Marriage and Population Concerns, another Auror, and an impatient-looking Hermione Granger.

He had not seen her for about six years. She was relatively unchanged, a little plumper, a little more womanly, but still the same bushy-haired, brown-eyed Gryffindor devourer of facts he had suffered at Hogwarts if the books spilling out of the bag at her feet were any indication. She was in the middle of berating the Junior Sub-Undersecretary.

"...and I have several meetings today with important clients!"

The Junior Sub-Undersecretary, his hands raised as if to ward her off, looked exceedingly glad to see the new arrivals. As Snape was unused to anyone being glad to see him, he began to have a very bad feeling about the whole situation.

"Ah!" said the harassed bureaucrat. "There you are at last! Now we can begin."

"Begin what, exactly?" demanded Snape, looking down his nose and raising his eyebrow in the patented Crushing Upstarts expression. Granger nodded approvingly and turned her own blazing glare on the annoying little man.

"Would you sit down, please?"

They glanced at the two rather impressive chairs which faced the desk at a safe distance. Their wands lay together on the desk's finely-polished surface. Snape noted approvingly that Miss Granger, like himself, elected to remain standing. *No kow-towing to lesser beings good girl* was the rather unexpected thought that crossed his mind. The Aurors took position on either side of the Junior Sub-Undersecretary, who cleared his throat and began nervously:

"We are present here today to celebrate the marriage of Severus Snape to Hermione Granger..."

He was silenced by a barrage of shouting from both parties.

Once they could be brought to order at wand-point, even though they were currently unarmed the Junior Sub-Undersecretary started to explain.

"Ministry records show that you are the last witch and wizard of marriageable age who remain single. It has been decided to bring forward the date of your union, as there is little point in waiting..."

"There are *three weeks* left until the deadline!" shouted Granger. "For all you know, I might be engaged to a wizard from out of the country, or a Muggle, even!"

The Junior Sub-Undersecretary pretended to consult a file which lay on the desk next to their wands.

"Neither of you has been reported as showing any signs of romantic or even particularly social behaviour during the past eight months "

"You've been *spying* on us?" she screeched, plainly outraged.

Snape didn't bother showing that he felt much the same. He actually felt a sneaking admiration that the Ministry knew him well enough to box him in. He was already beginning to consider his options for after the *fait was accompli*.

"Miss Granger, this *will* be accomplished this morning," the Junior Sub-Undersecretary was saying, trying for a reasonable tone. "Your wands will be returned once your vows have been spoken and the contract resides in the Ministry's archives. But not until then." The Aurors directed their wands at her menacingly as she took an angry step forward.

"I hardly think it is appropriate to threaten an unarmed woman on her wedding day, do you?" asked Snape acidly.

Miss Granger acknowledged his support with a glance.

"Give us our wands now!" she demanded. "I will have nothing to do with this charade!"

"This is a decision of the Wizengamot," replied the Junior Sub-Undersecretary, retreating a little behind his minders. "They want this whole marriage business finished," he continued a little desperately.

"I bet they do," was Snape's laconic interjection.

"You're the last! Let's just get it over and done with. None of us is getting out of here until we do!" exclaimed the Junior Sub-Undersecretary, cursing his luck in drawing the black counter in the office lottery which had landed him in this unenviable position.

"Miss Granger," said Snape, turning to her, "I suggest that we do, as he says, 'just get it over with'. For the present, it seems we are faced with a choice of either leaving our wands and our magic behind us right now, or of bowing to the inevitable and trying to rectify the situation fully armed later."

He watched her jaw clench before she gave him a curt nod and turned to face the Junior Sub-Undersecretary, who trembled in front of the silently raging witch and coolly threatening wizard.

"We are present here today to celebrate the marriage of..." he began again.

As soon as the words were spoken and the papers signed, Miss Granger seized her wand and hefted her bag of books threateningly.

"You just wait until I tell your mother about this, Percy Weasley," she hissed. "She'll hex your nadgers off!" And she left without a backward glance.

Once he had the address of his wife's flat, Snape decided to give her some time to cool off before approaching her. From what he remembered of Hermione Granger in a rage, she was better kept at arm's length until her powers of rationality reasserted themselves. He arrived in the evening, armed with a bottle of wine and an Indian take-away, to be confronted by a silence so profound coming from her front door that he was sure it was the result of a strong Silencing Charm. He placed his hand on the wood and felt some powerful magical residues leaking through. He knocked. Nothing. He tried again. Still nothing. He sent his Patronus through the keyhole.

Two seconds later, the door was flung violently open to reveal a scene of almost total destruction.

"What?" shouted Miss Gr..., Madam Sna... his wife, pointing her wand at his heart.

He held up his offerings and advanced gingerly. She turned her back on him and silently reinstated order in her living room, before methodically beginning to blast everything apart again. He wondered how many times she'd done that already. He cast a Shield Charm on himself and went through the room to a small kitchen, where he hunted for a corkscrew, plates and glasses while waiting for the explosions to cease.

He had just recast the warming charm on the food when she finally came into the kitchen, even more dishevelled than before, her eyes still bright with anger and her chest heaving interestingly. He held out a glass of red wine. She accepted it and took an unladylike gulp, leaning back against the counter and looking at nothing.

"You must find me spectacularly repellent to be reacting so strongly to becoming my wife, Miss Gr..., Madam Sna..., Hermione," he said.

She turned and gave him a very thorough once-over.

"*You're* not repellent. In fact, I'd say you've improved remarkably. It's this whole bloody situation that's repellent!"

She took another gulp.

"Merlin's golden bollocks! I don't want to be married! I have a *career!* I've even persuaded my boss at Gringotts to get me posted abroad, even though he doesn't want to. Look..." she fished in the bag perched on the counter-top and produced some Muggle air tickets, "...Peru two weeks' time."

Snape drew a similar set of tickets from an inside pocket.

"Australia, tomorrow," he said.

She smiled wryly.

"Well, that's two lives thoroughly hijacked by this fuckwitted, crapulent bloody law." Snape had had no idea that she was so foul-mouthed; he was rather impressed it must come from associating with goblins. "And have you read the small print, husband mine?" She bent to retrieve a screwed-up ball of paper from the floor behind the kitchen door, affording him a splendid view of her rear bumper. "This charming little document that we signed obliges us to produce no less than three magically-endowed children within the first ten years of our marriage, health permitting. *Three*," she repeated bitterly. "I don't even like children."

"Have some more wine," he suggested comfortingly. He was beginning to like this version of Hermione... Snape.

Halfway down the second bottle, the table between them strewn with take-away boxes and empty plates, the ills of the wizard and Muggle worlds well on the way to being dissected and resolved to their satisfaction, Hermione finally posed the question he had been waiting for.

"How do you keep yourself these days? I know you're not at Hogwarts any more."

"I write," he said, looking shifty.

She looked interested.

"Potions books? Academic papers?"

"Er... no. I have discovered quite a readership for, um, Muggle fantasy-horror novels. And," he added, deciding that it was best to get the worst out of the way all at once, "I write the gossip column in the *Daily Prophet*."

His wife's eyes widened. They were rather an attractive shade of brown, really.

"Oh good grief you're Melody Mumble? Everyone reads her even the goblins! But she knows *you* know everything that's going on... How on earth...?"

"You do know what I used to be in a former life, Hermione?" he asked sardonically. "It's a skill set that I've found to be really quite flexible. And as for the novels, I write them for pure enjoyment, and they make me a fortune. Life has actually begun to be fun over the past few years..."

"Until today," she finished for him. "Today has really bugged everything."

She hunted for the marriage contract, wiping lime pickle off it to examine the small print again.

"I even got the Gringotts lawyers to go over it for me. There's no getting out of this, even if we do leave the country. We're still obliged to produce three sodding children for the good of the wizarding community at large."

"Oh, I don't know, Hermione," he said, taking her hand and using that melted-chocolate quality he injected into his voice on special occasions. "Making children could be quite pleasant." He licked a trace of spicy oil off the ball of her thumb, watching her eyes widen and her pursed lips soften as he did so. "Even if it isn't for our own benefit."

Something wicked lit up in the depths of her gaze.

"You may have a point, Severus," she purred. "How about a *dozen* children, and a *legion* of grandchildren.... We'll overrun the whole bloody wizarding community with Snapes. We'll make them curse the day they ever set quill to parchment to write their precious Marriage Law."

The End