

# The Couch

*by shefa*

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Winner, "Best Fluff" in The New Library Awards.

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*Chapter 1 of 1*

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In later years, neither of them would remember how it began. Covert glances hidden behind the ubiquitous cup of tea and innocent questions slipped casually into conversation fooled nobody. Equally unobtrusive, piercing glares across the staff table and exasperated eye-rolls did not go unnoticed by fellow instructors. For reasons largely hypothesised and rarely voiced, and despite the best efforts of staff and portraits alike, the two most incisive members of the Hogwarts staff avoided interacting with one another at almost any cost.

Of course, if they had no choice but to work together to prevent the unfortunate sprouting of tentacles on an innocent first-year Hufflepuff, they did so. Reluctantly. And if the headmistress, with an unrelenting glare, assigned shared duties on some largely unnecessary committee or another, they complied. Irritably. The crackling tension that ensued in such cases, broken only by the acidic commentary of the Hogwarts Potions master, would have curdled milk at twenty paces. The headmistress's thinly veiled hopes that her Transfigurations mistress and Potions master might finally lower their defences enough to see what was plain to every other creature that had crossed their paths came, inevitably, to nothing.

Who knew how long this might have continued had it not been for the clandestine intervention of the newest addition to the Hogwarts staffroom?

The couch.

It was an altogether unassuming-looking couch. Crafted from the finest tan leather, it begged to be stroked, and the unconscious caress of many hands over years of use had smoothed it to a supple sheen. Its cushions did not appear uncommonly inviting, and its shape was not particularly striking. Frankly, if it had not been for the extraordinary effect it had on one of its regular occupants, its unique qualities might have escaped notice altogether. So insidious was its influence, so subtle its effects, a certain somebody on the Hogwarts staff failed to note that, despite his usual grumbling about useless meetings and wasted time, he began to come early to staff meetings or stay late grading his never-ending pile of parchments, just to lay claim to a spot.

There was just something about that couch.

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Severus loved the couch. He would never admit it to a living soul, or to a departed one for that matter, but the sofa drew him like a moth to flame. Ensnared on the soft leather, discarding the ridiculous velvet-wrapped feather pillows that littered its surface, he was finally able to *breathe*.

During staff meetings, or when other professors occupied the room, Severus had taken to spreading his belongings onto the cushions in a way that made it crystal clear that *nobody* was to occupy the couch alongside him. Efforts by McGonagall and Hooch to push aside the piles of parchments and books that occupied the cushions resulted in spectacular hexing of the sort that required a full day and the combined efforts of Flitwick and Granger to reverse. Severus still felt a warm glow of satisfaction remembering the intransigence of the pigs' snouts that he had bestowed on the witches who dared to intrude on his sacred space. That couch belonged to *him*.

Suspicious of this wholly uncharacteristic response to this piece of furniture, Severus attempted to determine its origins and to uncover the Dark magic that he was certain it must contain. There could be no other explanation, he reasoned, as he again made his way to the staffroom instead of to the privacy of his own quarters. No other reason for the feeling that grew stronger each day that the couch was *his* and that others' efforts to claim a place on it was nothing less than a violation of something sacred. He warred with that belief, battled with the *rightness* he felt. How dare this ridiculous piece of furniture...an object of wood and leather and feathers...exert a hold on him to rival those of masters he had abhorred? It simply *had* to be Dark. His feelings could not be trusted; hadn't he prevented *that* with admirable consistency?

And yet, research into its provenance yielded nothing. It had just... appeared, as if out of nowhere. It had appeared, he thought, in his most private moments, *fohim*. He was sure of it.

Unaccustomed to being gifted with anything resembling Grace, Severus persisted in his quest to uncover the hidden agenda of the couch. Relentlessly, he cast the most penetrating revealing spells he knew, bathing the weathered leather in pools of light...sienna and amber, turquoise and violet. But never, not even once, did he catch a glimpse of the sickly red of dried blood or the repulsive glow of iridescent green that would have indicated the presence of Dark magic.

Nonetheless, the persistent shimmer that lingered after each revealing spell confirmed that the sofa secreted *something* of magical origin. Unable to detect even the faintest malevolent intent, Severus finally contemplated the possibility that there could be a magic that drew him that was not... destructive.

And so finally, though reluctantly, he accepted that perhaps...despite the inescapable truth that he, Severus Snape, was both drawn to it and soothed by it...the couch was not Dark. Relieved that he could trust himself to it, if only in those moments when he was certain that he was unobserved, Severus closed his eyes and at last gave himself over to its embrace.

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Late in the night, when he was alone at last and free to sink fully into its hold, it had occurred to him that his time on the leather cushions anchored him, though he could not say why. It was as if, with each breath, the shrapnel of his past gradually dissolved, leaving more and more of what remained buried beneath...his most secret desires, closely held needs, and most far-flung fantasies...visible, if only to himself.

Why this gradual shifting of his internal landscape should be soothing and not terrifying was beyond him. Certainly being anywhere *neather* similarly evoked flashes of longings long suppressed, but he had no intention of ever allowing himself to trust *those* impulses. In fact, he had made an art form of avoiding and ignoring her, despite the best efforts of the headmistress. No way could those hopes that burned deep within him find their match in the intense and brilliant witch who had inexplicably become the bane of his existence. There was no way that he was going to find out, either, as he had promised himself that he would sooner leave Hogwarts than disclose to *her* what the memory of her scent and the echo of her laugh did to him in the dark of night when he should be sleeping.

On the couch, though, those waves of emotion and glimpses of an unfamiliar peace which swept over him like a dry desert wind were not nearly as frightening as he might have imagined. Yes, there were moments when the texture of the memories that flowed through him left him with the urge to fling himself forcibly from the cushions and bolt from the room. Indeed, there were times when the piercing sting of his regrets and the blunt force of his longings left an ache deep in his chest. And yet, held in the aura of that innocuous, innocent... *potent* piece of furniture, he stayed.

And so with each passing day, not unlike the slow weathering of leather by gentle hands and tired bodies, calloused layers of hurt and memory warmed and softened until they felt like barely more than the echoes of a story told long ago.

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Hermione wanted a spot on that couch. While she couldn't put her finger on what it was that called to her from the abandoned staffroom, she knew that she would have to move quickly in order to capture a moment alone, curled up on the leather cushions with a velvet-wrapped pillow clasped snugly in her arms.

But every time she poked her head into the staffroom, *he* was already there. If she were honest with herself, she would have to admit that finding Severus reclining on the tan sofa was a close second to doing so herself. A very close second. Maybe it was the way his body relaxed as he sank into the pillows. Perhaps the splay of his black-clad limbs across the soft tan leather drew her eye. Or maybe it was that the texture of the skin on his fine-boned hands competed with the sofa's supple leather for her touch.

But she could not permit herself to think about that. Nor about the strength in his elegant hands, or the line of his long legs under the black cloth of his trousers. Each time she caught him reclining (as he so often did) on the soft pillows, it was far too easy to imagine him allowing her to come close, perhaps even inviting her to curl up next to him, to take in the warmth of his body and feel the rumble of his deep, silky voice as her head rested on his chest.

She shook her head firmly. This was not to be indulged. This fantasy, this unrequited attraction to a man who had made it as clear as... well, as the nose on his face that he had no interest in having her within twenty paces of him, boded nothing but heartache. Besides, she was tired of constant skirmishes, of fighting for every last inch of what she wanted. Despite her earlier efforts to engage him, regardless of her cautious expression of interest in him, Severus Snape had demonstrated in every possible way that proximity to Hermione Granger was not to be borne. Notwithstanding a lifetime's pitched battles against windmills and on behalf of underdogs, this was one war that she had no intention of waging. Long legs and elegant hands be damned.

It was only on the day that Hermione finally took her courage in hand and decided that it was time to sit herself down on the sofa...regardless of whether or not he was already occupying it...that it occurred to her. When Severus was sitting on the couch, he looked almost... nearly... if you tilted your head *just so* and squinted... approachable.

And oh, how she longed to approach.

On second thought, she sighed to herself, maybe it wasn't *the couch* that drew her.

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He felt her before he saw her. He had finished his rounds for the night, scouring the castle for rule-breakers and sneakers-about when he felt the familiar pull of the staffroom. Traversing the path without conscious intention, he stopped short at the entryway. His eyes narrowed.

*Something was different*

He felt her presence radiating from behind the barriers of wood and stone. The pull to enter grew stronger despite his resolve to resist.

*She is an interloper*, he thought harshly. *Everybody knows that I come here at night*, he continued with increasing irritation as he lifted his hand to the latch and prepared to swing the door open. *She is here to provoke me, and I will not tolerate...* With typical abruptness, he pushed open the door to the staffroom, head of steam properly worked up, fully prepared to confront a belligerent Hermione Granger...

...only to find the bane of his existence, the woman who haunted his dreams, ensconced on the plush cushions of his couch, sound asleep. Stretched languorously across

its length, her unbound hair tumbling every which way, she somehow managed to make that couch *hers*.

It was as if his most cherished dream had been Conjured for his eyes only. Hermione, skin flushed with sleep, body relaxed and open, held reverently in his sacrosanct place. All thoughts of evicting her forgotten, Severus could think only about how he could best fit himself on those cushions right alongside her.

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The rustle of his robes as he approached woke her. Sleepy eyes opened to find his dark ones watching. She smiled, the haze of sleep leaving her receptive. Trusting. Those dark eyes met hers and held fast. For once, neither turned away.

The urge to slip alongside her on the cushions was almost more than Severus could bear. The familiar tension between them crackled, this time absent their usual irritable efforts to disguise or avoid its meaning. He wanted her. Oh, how he wanted her. Resistance forgotten, he was helpless before her and in the face of his need. Slowly, he reached out a hand to gently stroke her cheek. Her hand met his, clasped it tight, and tugged.

That was all he needed. Swiftly, he sidled up to the couch and slipped onto it, next to her. Bodies flush, one against the other, she tucked her head beneath his chin as they wrapped their arms around one another. Revelling in the sensation of Hermione's body pressed against his, it took him a moment to realise that she was shaking. Regret and hope knotting in the pit of his stomach, he brushed his lips against the top of her head, letting the stroke of his hands on her body be his voice.

*I am so sorry.* His hands scribed small circles on the small of her back, radiating the warmth that he had withheld from her for so long, and she leaned into his touch.

*Please... forgive me...* as he brought his lips to her brow, and then to the tender skin of her cheeks, her neck, her lips, bathed in her own tears. Pouring his longing and hope into the movement of his lips, Severus anointed her with whisper-light kisses, coaxing, soothing, begging her to understand his fear, to absolve him of his guilt and his shame.

*Only you, Hermione... I want... I need... oh, please...* His hands firmer now, stroking her with intent showing her his desire for her as a man desires a woman. With a moan, Hermione moved to cradle his face in her hands and brought his lips to hers, meeting his urgency with her own. Yes... yes...

Oh, yes.

As their kisses deepened, tenderness making way for the heat building between them, he felt the couch... shift... Before he could react, the sensation had stopped.

The familiar glow of firelight reflecting off the books on his shelves confirmed for Severus where the couch had deposited them. With barely a pause to determine that nothing untoward had occurred, Hermione turned her attention back to the man whose dark eyes and mesmerising spirit called to her.

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The discovery of the disappearance of the tan leather couch next morning (announced with a squeak by Professor Flitwick who had slipped into the staffroom early the next morning hoping to capture a spot on the coveted couch with a cuppa) became the subject of ribald speculation over the next several months. Its mysterious appearance in the staffroom hardly commanded as much attention as the fact of its abrupt departure and the presence of two distinctly different, but equally compelling upholstered chairs in its place. Despite the fact that hardly any of the faculty, apart from Snape, had managed to spend more than a fleeting moment sitting on it, that couch had clearly commanded the attention of the witches and wizards whose space it occupied.

So engrossed were they in the mystery of the appearing and vanishing couch that they failed to notice the emergence, much later that morning, of Professors Snape and Granger. Together. Quietly.

In fact, so busy were they devising Arithmantic formulae to explain the couch's movements and attempting to predict where it would next appear that they also failed to notice the departure of Professors Snape and Granger. Together. Without the smallest bit of bickering or even a whiff of crackling anger sparking between them.

It was only some months later that the regular comings and goings of the two formerly sparring professors and their even more regular prolonged absences drew notice. But by that time, Professors Granger and Snape announced that they had skipped engagement entirely and had been married the previous week during a school break.

The Professors Snape and Granger-Snape grudgingly agreed to host a small, celebratory fete in their dungeon residence, despite their preference to retire to said residence...alone, preferably with an abundance of chocolate sauce in hand...and not emerge until absolutely necessary. If at all.

The tan couch that graced the sitting room of the Snape's quarters triggered a flurry of questions (mostly aimed at one another) coupled with a farcical race to claim a space on its cushions. Only after Flitwick and Hooch had smugly secured their spots and the evening was in full swing did it occur to anybody to wonder why Snape seemed uninterested in reserving the couch for himself.

Snape himself was unavailable for comment; he was far too absorbed in conversation with his bride to notice.

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Endless thanks to my betas, Annie Talbot and Potions Mistress... your input improves my storytelling beyond measure.

Just a note: Not mine, just like to play.