

Dating a Heroine

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: Not mine. Damn.

A/N: And once again, the incomparable sshg316 has come through like the champion that she is! Any errors are my own, mostly having to do with my singular use of ellipses Shug, I wish you chocolate and the hot tub and many visits from the muses. You are the very best!

"Can I owl you sometime?" he asked, bending his handsome head to place a gentle kiss on her hand.

"You know," she began as delicately as she could, "I'm so awfully busy right now"

He straightened. "I had a lovely time tonight." His voice was almost reproachful.

"Geoffrey," she managed a delicate, nearly regretful sigh, "it isn't you. It's me."

He nodded stiffly and backed out the door, shutting it a bit too forcefully behind him. Hermione released the breath she had been holding.

"That makes thirteen," came a quiet but distinctly sarcastic voice from behind her.

She whirled to face the wing chair by the parlor fire. She had been sure all the other occupants of the house would have been in bed by now. She had, of course, been wrong.

Strolling across to glare down at the one holdout, she inquired, "Aren't you dead?"

Snape did not even look up from his book. "And aren't you married to a Weasley by now?" he asked in return.

She sank down into the matching chair with a heavy sigh. "You'd think," she answered, but she didn't really sound regretful.

Again without looking, he flicked a hand in her direction, and she found herself holding a glass of cognac even before she registered the fact. She laid her evening bag down and took a sip.

"Hero worshiper or just another bore?" he inquired, his voice sounding supremely uninterested.

"This one managed to be both," she replied airily. "Wanted to touch my . . . Order of Merlin."

"Did you let him?" Snape turned a page.

"Certainly. Can't disappoint my adoring public." She downed the rest of the cognac in a single gulp.

He refilled it without seeming to notice.

She looked across at him, her eyes narrowing suddenly. "Thirteen? You've been keeping count, have you?"

He shrugged ever so slightly. "Well, there's no telly."

"Why are you still here, anyway?" she asked, allowing a touch of irritation into her voice. "War heroes who've returned from the dead should be able to write their own tickets. Live anywhere, I would think."

"You would, wouldn't you?" He let the words hang in the air.

She leaned forward and looked into the fire. "Ought to move on myself, I suppose. Or at least give up the attempt to . . ." Her voice trailed off.

"Find your soul mate? Marry well? Secure an occasional shag?" he supplied helpfully.

She leaned back in her chair. "Well, at least I have a sex life."

His eyes flicked up to meet hers briefly. "A good imagination, anyway," he replied drily.

She smirked. "Do you really want to compare records?"

He did not deign to respond.

She set her glass down and rose from her chair. "I don't know why I bother, really," she said softly, gazing into the flames. "All they see, all they want to see, is Hermione Granger, Heroine. I haven't had a real conversation since Creepy Snake Man bit the dust for good."

"Yes, it must be frustrating." He turned another page.

She glared over her shoulder at him. "With a stranger," she said pointedly. "With somebody new. With a potential romantic partner."

The corner of his mouth twitched.

"Oh, shut it," she snapped and turned back to the fire.

"Never said a word," he drawled innocently.

"Maybe I should try Muggles," she muttered. "Guys who've never heard of Voldemort."

"Ah, yes," he answered silkily. "Experiment Number Six went so well, didn't it?"

"Oh, bloody..." She bit off the comment, remembering the date she affectionately (in a viciously affectionate way) thought of as That Idiot Chartered Accountant.

She cocked an eyebrow at Snape. "You've been paying a great deal of attention to my love life."

His eyes stayed resolutely on the pages of his book, but his snort was audible. "Calling that pathetic parade of misfits and losers a love life would dignify what the cat dragged in."

"One of those losers was a cousin of yours," she reminded him indignantly.

"My point exactly," he said with a smirk.

She crossed her arms, looking contemplative. "Three or four of them weren't really that bad," she recalled. "Ginny actually has pretty good taste when it comes to blind dates."

"Ha!" replied Snape, turning another page.

She regarded him haughtily. "And that musician was lovely."

"Wasn't he just," Snape agreed placidly.

She chewed her lip for a moment. "Okay," she admitted at last, "lovely isn't the word for him."

Snape peered up at her shrewdly. "Oh, no, lovely is exactly the right word. He was lovely. Incredibly, deliciously, unbelievably lovely."

She glared at him.

"Lovely, lovely, lovely," he murmured, turning it into a quiet ditty.

"You are an annoying little man," she proclaimed, but Snape rose immediately from his chair and took a step forward, towering over her with the full force of his personality, power, and extra eight or nine inches of height.

Hermione gasped involuntarily at the suddenness of his movement but managed to hold her ground. She cocked her head up at him. "And a bully and a bastard," she added for good measure.

His smile was feral. "And proud of it, I assure you." He bent down and breathed in her ear, "But never little, my dear. Not ever little."

She ignored the gooseflesh his whisper provoked. "Oh, is this a pissing contest?" she muttered, but her voice broke slightly, marring the effect.

He kept his lips inches from her ear. "If it is, my aim is better than yours."

She tilted her head to look up at him. "Practice does make perfect."

His lips twitched. "Not, apparently, in your case, however."

She raised her eyebrows.

"Potential Bedmate Number Thirteen?" he suggested, nodding toward the front door. "You still haven't been able to teach them how to date a heroine."

She batted her eyelashes at him. "I've tried to learn the rules myself. I begin by being humble."

"Good start," he acknowledged.

"Yet I've shared battle stories. But only when asked."

"Umm-hmm," he nodded encouragingly.

"I've inquired about their lives," she continued. "And I've listened to their answers."

"That must have been . . . enthralling," he murmured.

"More interesting sometimes than you might think," she replied brightly. As he simply looked at her, she added, "Not always." He continued to hold her gaze. "Okay," she admitted at last, "hardly ever."

His lips quirked. "Coming face to face with pure evil and nearly dying in the process of vanquishing it does tend to put things into perspective," he observed.

"Most wizards my age have really just started their lives," she responded somewhat defensively.

"Ah," he nodded. "And what do you conclude from this?"

She looked up at him as innocently as she could manage. "That there is something to be said for . . . perspective?" she asked meekly.

"Excellent reasoning. I'd award a house point or two, but..."

"But you're a couple of years too late," she reminded him. "And you don't do Gryffindors."

He raised an eyebrow.

She kept her face neutral. "Or do you?"

He said nothing.

She continued to hold his gaze. "So what else should I be practicing?"

"Patience, my dear," he purred. "You should be practicing patience. These . . . boys. They will test the limits of even the most courageous."

"Will they?" Her breath was slightly ragged.

"Oh, most assuredly. They will not appreciate that even a champion has limits. They will test the boundaries of forbearance. They will . . . clutch . . . at straws."

"Straws," she repeated. Her fingers brushed the front of his robes very lightly.

His voice was barely a whisper. "And then there is . . . taste. Selectivity. Appreciation of the necessary qualities."

"Which are?" she breathed.

He paused for a heartbeat. "Incapable of being taught," he sighed. He raised a slender finger and slid it delicately across the curve of her cheek. "One is born with it. Or one is not . . ."

"I see," she replied with the slightest shiver.

His finger had reached her lips. He brushed across them delicately, then drew it to his own. "Indeed," he breathed.

The tips of her fingers stroked up the front of his robes, bumping gently against the endless row of tiny buttons holding them closed. She focused on keeping her breathing slow and steady. She did not entirely succeed.

As her fingers reached the top button and paused fractionally, Snape suddenly straightened up, strode back to his chair, and resumed his concentration on his book.

Hermione blinked and fought to maintain her balance.

She stared at the man in the chair in front of her, studying the casual drape of one languid hand across the arm of his chair, the hooded eyes fixed on the book in his other hand. He looked as though he had never moved from his seat.

She took in a deep breath and let it out slowly. And then her lips curved into the tiniest smile.

"Eight o'clock, then?" she asked.

His eyes flickered briefly, but he did not look at her. "Eight o'clock?" he asked with a tiny frown.

"Tomorrow," she answered easily. "A late dinner, I think. I will leave it to you to choose the venue."

He continued to gaze at the book.

Her smile became broader, and she gathered up her evening bag from the side table. As she started to pass him, her hand swept up one of his robe-encased thighs, continuing on until it reached the hand holding the book. He finally broke his concentration to look intently at the delicate hand caressing his.

She leaned in and nuzzled his ear. "And, Severus," she whispered oh so softly, "it's really much easier to read when you hold it right side up."

She squeezed his hand before releasing it, beginning a triumphal exit.

Once again, he was too fast for her, however. As she crumpled into his arms, replacing the now-forgotten tome as the focus of his attention, she protested, "Now, is that any way to treat a heroine?" But he had begun a much more complicated series of lessons that prevented further speech for a considerable time afterward.