

How to Tell Your Friends...

by chivalric

Hermione has to tell her two best friends some news, and chooses a strange method to do so.

This is a sequel to "Christmas Presents."

One-shot story

Chapter 1 of 1

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Many thanks to CharmedForce and Amor Eternal for betaing this story. Maybe, if I continue writing, I will learn about English grammar and gerunds. Although I doubt it.

"Come on, Hermione I can see in your face that something is wrong, and I think it's time that you finally put the cards on the table." Harry Potter, former Boy Who Lived, war hero, defeater of Voldemort, husband to Ginny, and father to little James, looked anxiously at Hermione. Harry, Ron, and she had just arrived in a small Muggle pub.

She looked miserable. In front of her sat a cup of tea, although both Harry and Ron knew that she preferred cider on a night out.

Stirring her tea, Hermione gave a deep sigh and said nothing.

Ron placed his arms round Hermione's shoulders and hugged her. He loved her deeply, as a friend, and she was godmother to his two-week-old baby-girl. Hermione usually was the cheerful type: never gloomy, never snappy. When feeling downhearted, she only needed a book or two to get better.

Not tonight, though. She had owed them that she would like to meet them, both Harry and Ron but neither Ginny nor Lavender. She had given the address of this shabby little pub in the middle of nowhere, and now she sat on her chair at the bar and hadn't said more than 'Hello' since they had arrived.

"Is it the job?" Ron asked, gently rubbing her arms, as she seemed to be cold. "Don't you get enough orders?" He knew that the book-binding business was hard, but he knew as well that Hermione, although not yet 23, was the best in her trade. She could tame even the wildest books, and her hands showed the signs of a witch devoted to her job scarred, bitten, and bruised.

Hermione shook her head. "Everything is fine with the job, I am getting drowned with inquiries, and I don't have a single space left for all the books people want me to keep. It's great, really..." her voice trailed off. Staring into the big mirror behind the bar, lost in thoughts, she was oblivious to the unhappy look her friends shared behind her back.

"We know you have moved..." Harry said hesitantly. She hadn't told them her new address yet. "Is it I mean, if your new landlord is bothering you..." But Harry couldn't really believe that any landlord would dare to hassle Hermione. She looked so innocent, but could become very scary when she put her will into it.

She denied the landlord theory as well and took a sip from her tea.

Ron propped his head in his hand. "Well, then, is it... do you... is it a girls' thing?" There was curiosity in his voice as well as alarm. Lavender had instructed him to simply ask Hermione if she suffered from a broken heart, or if she had fallen in love girls' things, so to speak.

Harry got his drink into the wrong throat and sprayed ale over the counter at the thought that Hermione could actually tell them about her love life, which was non-existent, as they both knew, but still... She was single, and not interested in any man. Maybe oh, horrors! she would start crying any moment that she would end up as an old spinster!

The door to the pub opened and a customer strolled in, ignored the bar, and chose a small table in the corner. The shadows fell onto his face and hid it from two pairs of eyes. Harry and Ron wanted to stay undisturbed, and they wanted to be sure that this man wasn't getting too close to them and Hermione.

"Are you ill?" The thought struck Ron's mind like lightning. What else than failing health could make Hermione so grave?

Another deep sigh. "Not ill. No heartache. But... I need to talk to you and it isn't easy and you won't like it and I simply don't know where to start!" Hanging her head, she ran her fingers through her ever wild hair only to frown a moment later, casting a fierce glance into the corner where the new customer sat and quietly drank his Guinness. "Now that's the last thing I need him being here whilst I try to tell you..."

"Tell us what, Hermione!" Harry urged, observing the dark figure in the corner with suspicious eyes. The man looked somewhat familiar, although he couldn't quite place him. Plain black trousers, a dark jumper, a black leather jacket. But the hand that now took the glass was exceptionally pale, and the hair, although bound into a ponytail, was definitely very black and very long.

Harry was off his chair in an instant, crossed the floor, approaching the not so strange stranger with fierce outrage. "Snape!" Harry hissed. "What the heck are you doing here? Get out! This is a private conversation."

Snape leaned back in his chair, looking at Harry unimpressed. "And this is a public house," he answered quite calmly, given the fact that the young man in front of his table was obviously just about to strangle him.

Ron came over and stood shoulder to shoulder with his friend. "You tell us you just came here coincidentally?" Incredulous, he stared at his former teacher, the one he had always hated most, the one he had never trusted despite the fact that his name had been cleared after the war. "You just stumble into the same pub we are in to drink a beer?"

Thoughtfully, Snape took another sip, then slowly placed the glass in front of him. "The colour suits me," he said, with a thin smile upon his lips.

"Just. Get. Out!" Harry hissed. "Hermione is distressed enough without you being here. She just said so. You are the last person she wants to see. I take it you don't have business here so leave. Go!"

"I don't think so," Snape replied coolly and stood up. He was still taller than both of the men who tried to block his way. The looks of him in normal clothes was strange.

He very nearly looks human, Harry thought, and shared another dubious look with Ron whilst Snape simply walked around them and slowly approached the bar. A moment later he towered over Hermione.

"Damn," Ron hissed through gritted teeth. "If he hurts her, if he says as much as a wrong word, if he dares to make her cry I..." Both he and Harry hurried to get back to their friend, building a wall against the scary person of Hogwarts Potions master.

Snape pierced Hermione with his charcoal black eyes. Just when Harry lost his nerve and was about to reach for his wand, Snape crossed his arms over his chest and said in his cold, emotionless voice, "So you haven't told them?"

Hermione shook her head and said nothing.

"Why not?"

"I... it didn't seem right, or better, I haven't found the right words." She looked down, avoided Snape's look and now crossed her own arms, wrapped them round her fragile body as if she were cold.

Harry and Ron watched with surprise this exchange of words, slowly realising that the big bat of the dungeons might know something they didn't.

Ron snapped, "You've spied on her!"

"You've spied on our friend, you bastard!" Harry didn't know what to do. He had promised Ginny to spend a nice evening with Hermione, and now it looked as if he had to fight Snape any moment.

Snape ignored them. "I can't quite believe that *you* of all people are of a lack for words, Miss Babble-mouth."

"Oi! Watch what you're saying!" Ron shouted, getting furious.

Taking another step closer, Snape growled, "You didn't tell them that you are going to marry?"

Maybe Hermione would have liked to answer that, but both Ron and Harry cried out in surprise. Luckily, there weren't any other guests in the pub.

Ron and Harry were desperate for a few answers, but Snape, being merciless and well known to never let a victim out of hand, continued. "And you didn't find the time to ask them if they would witness your marriage either?"

Hermione shook her head again. At the same moment, Harry and Ron grabbed either of her arms and pulled, trying to get her attention. "You are going to marry? Who? When? How? And you want us to witness it? Great, Hermione, that's marvellous but why does *he* know about it and we don't?" Harry put his arm around his friend's shoulder, observing with a slight shock that she was trembling. "Hermione, I can throw him out with my own hands," he offered, staring in dismay at Snape, who seemed to enjoy this situation tremendously. But Hermione, quite unlike herself, kept quiet and only shook her head.

Snape fixed his two best-hated former students with a glare. "June 7th, four in the afternoon, Hogwarts," he snapped. "Make sure no other... appointment gets in your way."

Ron's mouth hung agape. Hermione was going to marry? He didn't even know that she had a boyfriend!

Snape, on the other hand, wasn't finished. "And your pregnancy? Did you at least manage to tell them that, if nothing else?"

A head was shaken. Shoulders trembled. Her head hung low. Hermione didn't dare to open her mouth. She was a bit pale in the face; her tea had gone cold.

Harry and Ron each took a step back and stared at their friend as if she had grown two heads all of a sudden.

"Pregnant?" Harry whispered.

"How?" Ron breathed.

"Merlin, Hermione, you really call those two dunderheads friends still?" Snape exclaimed, his black eyes blazing. "One would have guessed that they knew by now how babies are made!"

Hermione covered her face in her hands. Her shoulders shook.

"You made her cry, Snape," Harry hissed and now pulled out his wand. Ron blocked his friend from curious looks from the counter, but the barman had vanished into the back anyway. They were alone.

Snape's hands shot out and snatched Hermione's wrists, pulled her hands away from her face and revealed tears streaming down her cheeks. Tears and the biggest grin one could imagine. Her laughter rang in his ears.

Two wands got drilled in each of the Potions master's shoulders. "Step back from her," Ron demanded with cold hate in his voice. He was at a loss why Hermione would cry and laugh at the same time, but what the hell Snape would pay for what he had done to her.

"Get lost," Harry simply said. "Out of here. Now."

Snape released her hands and took a step back, but his eyes never left Hermione's face. "And above everything else you messed up tonight, you also failed to reveal the identity of your future husband and father of your child. That much is quite obvious." With a quick move he brought his hands up again, snatched the wands that were pointed at him, and dropped them carelessly to the floor. "Truly, I wonder what devil rode me to propose to you."

"I'm sorry," Hermione wheezed, one hand pressed into her mouth to stifle the laughter that erupted from deep inside her, "but I couldn't resist the temptation. When you came in, I simply couldn't think of anything else but how you would growl at them, and of the look on their faces... Sorry, beloved; really, I am. Honestly!" Slipping off her chair, she stepped in front of the tall, dark man with the frown in his face. She reached out and placed a hand behind his neck, pulled him down, and kissed him.

Harry and Ron stumbled and found hold only at the bar. They looked as if someone had beaten them hard on the head, repeatedly.

"Eh?" Harry managed, staring at the kissing couple. Hermione kissed Snape? What nightmare was that?

"Whassit?" stammered Ron, wishing he were home in bed where Lavender would assure him that this was just a bad dream.

Snape wrapped his arms around his bride, broke the kiss, and placed her back on her chair as if she weighed nothing. "You are terrible," he scolded. But a smile was smoothing his face. "A dreadful, terrible, cheeky, irreverent witch!"

"That's why you love me so much," she said, still grinning.

"True," he said. "Amongst other reasons." He gently wiped a loose strand of hair out of her face.

The tenderness of the gesture made Harry gasp. Snape and tender? Snape and... Hermione? His eyes trailing from Snape to Hermione and back, Harry asked, "Why didn't you tell us?" Briefly, his gaze flicked to her still flat belly, and he blushed deeply as the thought crossed his mind of how and with whom this baby had been made.

She looked at him. "I tried to," she said, "but I really didn't know where to start. Then, when I saw Severus coming in, I decided that it would be best to let him do the talking. At least, I figured, there was no way you would mistake his words, as you sometimes mistake mine." Looking at the man she loved she said, "You are so very convincing when you scold people. You must admit, this was the best way to do it."

"Your way always seems to be the best way," he gruffed, pulling a chair closer. "Now as you two will witness our marriage may I invite you to a drink?" He sounded as if he had just offered them two years of detention, but neither Ron nor Harry was daft enough to decline.

"Sure," they said, "and then you can tell us how this all started."

Hermione smiled, and Severus's hand slipped round her waist, pulling her close. "Remember Christmas last year?" she asked. "When I didn't want to come to your house, Harry? Well, I had kidnapped Professor Snape out of his rooms instead and..."