

Journey to Redemption

by Mars1

At Draco's suggestion, Severus decides to make amends to some of the people struggling in the aftermath of the war. In the process, he restores old friendships and makes new ones.

luvsev - Asteroid Beater

Chapter 1 of 7

At Draco's suggestion, Severus decides to make amends to some of the people struggling in the aftermath of the war. In the process, he restores old friendships and makes new ones.



Severus walked into his godson's home, noticing that Draco, much like his father, was a voluptuary, and his home showcased that fact, for there were plush, cream coloured carpets and rich colours on the walls. Candlelight cast shadows over large, overstuffed pillows in contrasting hues that decorated the couches and two arm chairs.

'Welcome, Uncle!' Draco said, extending his hand to Severus, who clasped it for a moment. 'I'm glad you could come.'

'When have you known me to miss a dinner?'

Draco smirked at Severus's remark; he knew he was being facetious. 'Fish and chips alright with you? I'm in the mood for different faire tonight other than our usual spread.'

Severus nodded and followed mutely behind Draco through the house and into the kitchen, where dinner was already on plates in their respective places. They sat through dinner, trading offhand comments and stories from work when Draco touched on a subject Severus had considered many times in the four years since the end of the war: leaving Hogwarts. There was part of him that wanted to, but the other part had no idea what he would do if... when he left Hogwarts. He had options, of course, but nothing appealed to him. What he desired most was freedom to do as he wished, to be able to work when he needed and travel as well. The options available did not offer all he

desired, so he stayed where he had for more than twenty years.

'I've been thinking, Uncle.'

'About?' he asked, lifting a chip to his mouth and taking a bite, his teeth sinking into the hot, salty potato.

'How you mentioned wanting to move on from the castle and into your own life.' He watched Severus's eyebrow quirk in cautious curiosity, and Draco knew he wanted to warn him but thought better of saying anything, deciding it was better to listen. 'I remember you telling me of how weary you've grown with the routine and frustration that teaching brings.'

Severus nodded his assent, wondering where Draco might proceed with his line of thought.

'I was thinking... how about you do something different, leave this career behind? Move onto something that will benefit others and give you the freedom you desire. Obviously, teaching isn't cutting it for you anymore. You think no one listens to you, which causes frustration.'

'It does. You must have something in mind or you would not have brought it up over a private dinner.'

'You never were one for patience, were you, Uncle?' Draco chuckled, sipping his beer.

'No, I suppose not.'

Draco swallowed the lump that had formed in his throat and proceeded, knowing Severus would scoff at his idea. 'Have you thought of volunteering your services? You could live off of the savings you've accrued over the years while you help others.'

'Are you joking, Draco?'

'No, I'm not. People could use help, and you have the knowledge and skills to be able to assist them. Some families, such as the Weasleys, need help rebuilding their homes and lives they've lost during the course of war. Others could benefit from advice from someone who has experience.'

As he often did, Severus studied the lineament of Draco's face: the way his lips were set in a thin line and his eyes, grey as ever, sparkled. By his rigid body language, it was obvious he meant what he said. 'You're serious,' he muttered.

'Yes. Honestly, it would be a worthwhile endeavour. I know you have many regrets—'

'Enough to fill a library.'

'If that's the way you feel, you can take this chance to make amends and possibly friendships, too. You have nothing tying you to your old, lonely life.'

'You have a point, Draco. Just one question though: how do you suppose I do this? Am I supposed to walk up to people, many of whom are former students who dislike me despite what I've done in the war, and volunteer my services?'

Draco drained the last of his beer from the bottle and set it down a little too hard on the table. 'I didn't say it would be easy, Uncle, because it probably won't be. Some may turn you away, and you must be prepared for that. If they do, move on with the knowledge that you tried. If they won't accept help, that's on them. You will have tried, and that's the important part.'

As Draco continued to speak, Severus rested his head in his palms, lost in thought, wondering what sort of reception he would be met with and whom he would go to first.

The night wore on, and soon it was time for Severus to return home.

'Are you sure you won't stay? You could sleep in the guest suite, if you'd like.'

'Another time, perhaps. Tonight, I need to think.' Severus stepped through the Floo and disappeared in a whirl of green flames.

Once inside his home office, he walked over to the antique, oak desk with clawed feet and sat down in the leather chair. Leaning back, he rested his head on the soft, lambskin material and closed his eyes, making up his mind as to whether he really wanted to go through with leaving the home he had known the longest. In the end, he decided it best to leave it behind and start anew. After a few moments of silent contemplation, he straightened his relaxed position and pulled out the top drawer, withdrawing a quill, parchment, and his favourite forest-green-coloured ink. Before he set the blank page on the blotter and began to write the letter he had imagined many times, he removed the Sneakoscope placed by the inkwell—he didn't need one more reason to give him pause in regards to his resignation.

He wrote to Minerva, the only friend he had inside Hogwarts, telling her his time there was at an end, and he gave her the names of three qualified individuals who were reliable and skilled for his position. He said all he needed to over the course of the letter, and at the end, he signed it, leaving a forwarding address if she needed him for anything more.

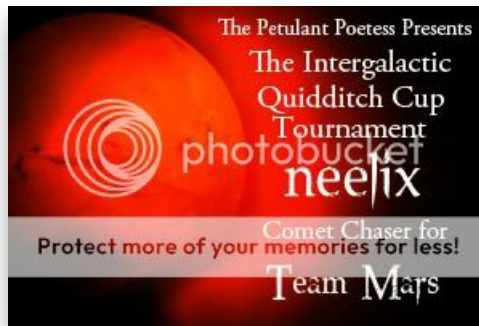
He read the letter several times before inserting it into an envelope and sealing it with green wax. He then called for his owl and tied the letter to her leg. He watched her fly out of the open window and into the balmy, summer night, knowing full well he had done the right thing.

A/N: The following prompt words were used: ink, forest, lineament, voluptuary, Sneakoscope, and fish and chips. Thanks to WriterMerrin for the beta work.

Neelix - Comet Chaser

Chapter 2 of 7

At Draco's suggestion, Severus decides to make amends to some of the people struggling in the aftermath of the war. In the process, he restores old friendships and makes new ones.



A good night's sleep was something that Severus cherished. During the war, decent sleep had been like gold dust, and so afterwards, he had revelled beneath the covers as much as his teaching schedule allowed. Until now.

It was only five a.m, but his thoughts had been racing, interrupting his dreams and making him so restless that he couldn't bear it any longer. Thanks to Draco and his bloody bright ideas, all Severus could think about was the damage he had personally done to others during the war, and names and faces were swirling through his mind, taunting him with memories of his ill temper and hurtful behaviour.

There was one name in particular that would not stop nagging at him, so with chagrin, he threw his bedclothes back and grabbed his wand with celerity before striding purposefully into his office. He slumped into his chair and took the top page from his block of parchment, lifted his quill and then paused. He hadn't thought that writing to Potter would be so difficult, but the circumstances were such that rejection was very possible. The thought made his stomach churn.

He hadn't meant to be horrible to the boy. Yes, he looked like his father, but his temperament was mostly Lily. The knowledge that Harry Potter truly was his mother's son had cut him to the quick, making him lash out like a scared kitten. If he owed anyone, he owed Harry the most.

He closed his eyes for a brief moment and then began to write.

A week later, Severus was standing in the hallway of twelve, Grimmauld Place with a bemused Harry Potter, feeling incredibly uncomfortable and more than a little foolish. The boy had shaken his hand as he welcomed him into the house, and now he was standing there, looking at him as if he were some sort of puzzle to be solved.

'I still don't understand why you want to help, sir,' Harry said with a smile. 'But I am grateful. For everything,' he said meaningfully.

Severus tried not to wince. 'It is I who should be grateful, Potter. You freed me from the Dark Lord and brought me peace. I also believe that if you intend to stay here, you will have need of my expertise in clearing this mausoleum of a house of all its Dark magic.'

He avoided Harry's incredulous gaze and looked around the dingy hallway. His eyes turned toward the curtain-covered portrait of Walburga Black, the notorious and outspoken mother of his old nemesis, Sirius. He turned back to Harry with a raised eyebrow.

'Still there, is she?' he murmured quietly.

Harry nodded with a frown. 'Unfortunately, yes. She's been causing no end of problems, to be honest.'

Severus took a slow step towards the portrait with his ebony wand held lightly in his hand. 'How so?' he asked.

'She doesn't approve of my houseguest,' Harry said bitterly. 'Hermione is staying here while her new apartment is being renovated.'

'I see,' Severus replied with a slightly disinterested tone. He proceeded towards the moth-eaten curtains with determination.

'Be careful, sir. She really is very...' Harry warned.

In a flurry of dust, the curtains flew open, startling Severus, who stumbled backwards and landed with a thump against the opposite wall.

'Filth! Scum! Bringing shame on the house of my fathers...' The wizened, yellow face of Sirius's mother screamed from the painting, causing Severus to cover his ears as Harry sent a Stunner toward it. The curtains closed, and the sudden silence was almost deafening.

'As I was saying, she really is very loud.' Harry smirked as Severus brushed himself down and straightened his dishevelled hair.

'What's going on, Harry?'

Severus groaned inwardly as a familiar female voice drifted their way, closely followed by its source. Hermione Granger descended the stairs, looking almost exactly as she had the last time he had seen her. She was dressed in Muggle jeans, sweater and dirty, white trainers, but there was something different that he could not quite place. She was looking at him questioningly, and he stared back at her coolly.

'Miss Granger,' he said, nodding in acknowledgement.

'Hello, Professor. Harry said you were coming to help out. I'm not sure you'll have much luck with her, I'm afraid. Do you know a potion that can dissolve a Permanent Sticking Charm?'

Her warm, wide smile took the sting out of the comment, and Severus realised she was merely trying to be amusing. He gave her a small smile in return. 'Sadly not. I fear I will need to find a different method to shift her from her throne.'

'I was about to make some tea, if you'd like some?'

Hermione stepped into the hallway and stood in front of Severus for a moment, and he realised what had changed. The witch had grown taller, the top of her head now almost level with his nose. He no longer stared down at the top of her curly hair, but looked into her intelligent, caramel eyes. They were almost twinkling, and with a sigh, he realised that she had accepted him in the same way Potter had. Feeling humbled and unable to speak for a moment, he nodded and then followed the friends into the kitchen.

Two hours after drinking tea companionably with his ex-students, Severus had divested himself of his jacket and was standing in his shirt sleeves in front of a still-screaming but thankfully silenced portrait. Beads of sweat stood proud on his forehead, the result of his concerted effort with various spells and hexes. Nothing would shift the frame, and he stared angrily at the bulging face of Walburga Black as she became even more animated. He turned slightly and observed Hermione as she walked from the kitchen and towards the library, casting a wary glance at the portrait as she neared him.

'Nice to see she's quiet for once.' Hermione frowned as the woman started to silently rant with even more venom in her direction. 'How is it going?'

'I was on the verge of asking her politely to move to another frame, but I fear the woman is immovable,' he said with frustration.

Hermione let out a hearty laugh and then stopped and stared at Walburga, her eyes focussed at some distant point, with her mouth open slightly.

'Granger, you look like a fish,' Severus said, snapping her out of her reverie and earning him a hard glare.

'Actually, I had an idea, but you're obviously doing so well on your own...' Hermione started to walk away.

'Wait. If you have something to contribute, Miss Granger, I am willing to listen.' Severus stepped towards her and looked at her beseechingly. He was so desperate; he would accept any help, even from Hermione Granger.

'Well, it is a long shot,' she said, absently curling a length of hair around her finger. 'You'd better follow me.'

The empty frame on the wall almost mocked Hermione, who had flushed a deep shade of pink. Luckily, the bedroom was dark, and she hoped that Professor Snape wouldn't notice.

'He can be temperamental,' she said by way of explanation.

'So it would seem. The idea is not without merit, however. I believe we should pay a visit to Minerva,' he replied.

'We had better bring that with us,' Hermione said, frowning at the blank painting in frustration. 'Otherwise he will continue to hide.'

Phineas Nigellus Black sat in his frame, every inch the superior Slytherin. Severus stood in the middle of Minerva's office and looked up at him surreptitiously.

'Ready, Miss Granger?' he asked her quietly.

Hermione lifted the empty canvas from Grimmauld Place and balanced it carefully on Minerva's desk, then exited the room.

'Professor Black,' Severus intoned respectfully. 'I wonder if I could trouble you to visit me in your other frame?'

'Who is that?' Phineas asked slowly. 'Snape?'

'Indeed, Headmaster. I require your assistance with a most delicate matter.' Severus had a brief flashback of obsequiousness at the foot of the Dark Lord, and shuddered.

A dark shadow flickered at the edge of the empty frame, and Severus smirked to himself. It was typically Slytherin of him to insist on playing the game to his own rules, even though he was only a portrait.

'Speak, then,' said the disembodied voice of Phineas.

'It involves your great-granddaughter, sir,' Severus began, only to be interrupted by Phineas abruptly.

'Ha! She may be family, Snape, but any help you need from me with that mad, old witch is going to cost you,' he sneered.

'I don't see how any amount of Galleons could be of any possible use to you, Headmaster,' said Severus bitterly. His hope of Phineas Nigellus being of any help was quickly fading.

'You're not thinking like a Slytherin, Snape. You disappoint me. I have my price. See to it, and I can assure you that my great-granddaughter will no longer be welcome in the Noble and Most Ancient House of Black.' Phineas had appeared in the frame as he spoke, and he folded his arms smugly across his chest.

Severus sighed. He had been out-Slytherined.

Harry stood in the hallway of twelve, Grimmauld Place and examined the wall where the portrait of Walburga Black had once sat. He ran his hand over the wall slowly and let out a low chuckle.

'I can't believe you did it,' he said.

'I did have some assistance,' Severus turned and nodded to Hermione, who smiled a little shyly at him.

'You did the persuading, sir. I don't know how you managed to do it, but it worked amazingly.' Hermione's eyes shone with admiration.

'And Sirius's mother is now in St Mungo's, you say?' Harry asked.

'She now adorns the wall of the Janus Thickey Ward,' Severus replied with a smirk.

'Blimey. Those poor nurses,' Harry laughed.

'How did you get him to help, sir?' Hermione was dying to know.

'I appealed to his Slytherin sensibilities and called in a favour from Kingsley. Phineas Nigellus Black now has a portrait in the office of the Minister for Magic,' Severus said with a lop-sided smile.

'Oh, no,' Hermione said with a nervous giggle. 'Surely the next Minister will just shift him once he becomes too annoying. Which he will,' Hermione said, remembering her time in the tent during the war.

'Permanent Sticking Charm,' Severus said quietly.

Harry and Hermione stared at him, and they started to laugh.

Severus said his goodbyes to Harry after they shared takeaway pizza in the kitchen, and Hermione walked him to the door, past the now portrait-less wall. They walked in silence for a moment until Hermione asked the question that had been burning her since Severus had written to Harry.

'Why did you come to help, sir?' she asked softly.

Severus turned and stared into her eyes, contemplating telling her a lie and finding that he couldn't. The witch had shown him nothing but friendship and respect, and he found himself wanting to extend the same to her.

He sighed. 'I have not been the nicest of men, Miss Granger. You are surely aware that I have been mean, heartless and incredibly hurtful to many people over the years. It is time to make amends.'

Their eyes met, and Hermione smiled softly. 'I understand, sir.'

'I should be going,' Severus said, placing his hand on the doorknob.

'Call me if you need any more help,' Hermione said sincerely.

'I will, Miss Granger. Thank you,' he said with a smile.

As he walked quickly down the front steps into Grimmauld Place, he heard her voice calling after him.

'Call me Hermione.'

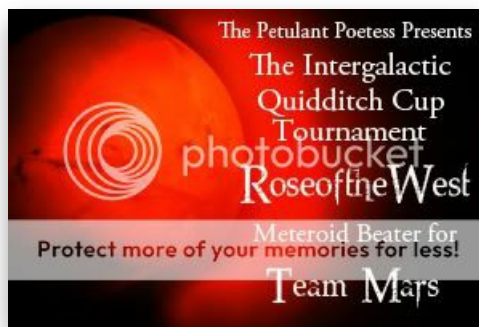
Prompt words used: Wand, Celerity, Kitten

Author's notes: Thanks to WriterMerrin for the beta and to people reading. Please review.

RoseoftheWest - Meteoroid Beater

Chapter 3 of 7

Severus finds a charming solution for Andromeda Tonks and receives some assistance in return."



Andromeda Black Tonks looked at the letter again. He would be here soon. He was previously known for being annoyingly punctual, except when required to do something for his dark master, her daughter and husband had often said. Of course, things were different since the war was over. Heaven knew she was different. There was a crack of Apparition. It startled her even though she was expecting it. She closed her eyes, took a deep breath, and opened them. She then smiled as she opened the door.

'Severus! How lovely to see you!'

'Andromeda. Thank you for letting me come.'

She led him to the dining room. 'I must admit I was intrigued by the note Harry sent me. You'll have to tell me how you got dear Auntie Walburga to leave that wall. I only went there once for an Order of the Phoenix meeting and got an earful. Your poor mother must be rolling in her grave, you blood traitor! As though Druella Rosier Black would ever do anything so uncouth as roll.'

She directed him to his seat and opened a tureen. 'I hope you don't mind some stew and fresh bread? It seemed the best option for this time of the evening.'

He nodded. 'It looks delicious. I would have arranged to come earlier, but I'm still making some potions for the Hogwarts infirmary before I leave the school for good. I was in my laboratory until just before I came here.'

'It's quite all right. I have all the time in the world.' She sighed. 'Of course, Teddy doesn't.'

'Harry said you're having a problem and I might be able to help?'

'It's the morphing. Now he copies the looks of anyone he sees. I can't take him to the park any more. I'm afraid I'll bring home the wrong little boy.'

'And you want me to do what?'

'I don't know; Harry said you were interested in helping people.'

'Given his age, a potion is undesirable, I'm sure. It's a sort of transfiguration... I'll have to give it some thought. I did allow for the entire week.'

As they ate their late dinner, they spoke of people they both knew. Andromeda knew a surprising number of witches and wizards that Severus knew from his Death Eater days and just as many he knew from working with the Order. He realized that she had straddled the same worlds that he had, although in an entirely different way. He had her laughing hysterically at the way he had maneuvered both Walburga and Phineas Nigellus Black out of their portraits at number twelve, Grimmauld Place.

'Oh dear!' she sighed. 'Poor Kingsley and Minerva will have their hands full. I wonder just how that will work at St. Mungo's, too.'

She led him up the stairs to the room he would use. He had a thought as she turned to go back down. 'Andromeda?' She stopped and looked at him expectantly. 'You raised a Metamorphmagus before. Nymphadora must have been just the same. How did you handle her?'

She was surprised she hadn't remembered before. 'Oh! Wait, just a minute.' She went downstairs and returned with several journals. 'Ted had a charm. I don't remember it, but it's probably in one of these books. I've never read them, but I can't let them go, either.'

'Then you're probably right and it's here. Would you rather look yourself?'

She shook her head. 'No, I don't think I could stand it. You'll probably be better at figuring out how to use the charm, if you find it. Please go easy on whatever you read about me, though. I was so young, back then.' She smiled and left him, then.

The kitchen must have been under his room. He heard her doing the dishes and settling things to rights. He remembered that Tonks and Ted had both said she was the good housekeeper of the family. He wondered how the sister of Bellatrix and Narcissa could be so different from either of them.

When he came down the stairs the next morning, he found breakfast in the kitchen. In the light of day, he realized Andromeda had aged quite a bit in the last five years. He supposed losing her husband and then her daughter and son-in-law in quick succession had taken its toll on her. He felt the weight of additional guilt fall upon him. From where she stood by the sink, she pointed to his place and watched in satisfaction as he filled his plate.

'Teddy, this is Professor Snape. He taught your mum, and he went to school with your dad.'

'Wotcher,' said the boy, whose hair was shifting between incarnadine shades of salmon, pink, and red.

'Good morning, Mr. Lupin.'

'So you knew my parents?'

'I did indeed.'

The five-year-old nodded but was now bored of the subject. He inspected the professor's plate. 'You should have some of Grandma's pancakes. She puts a secret ingredient in them.'

'Oh, really?' Snape was interested in spite of himself. 'I have an interest in secret ingredients, myself.'

The boy looked at his grandmother and leaned toward the wizard and said, conspiratorially but in a stage whisper, 'There are really two of them: cinnamon and vanilla.'

The two adults tried not to laugh. Snape said, in an equally loud whisper, 'I'll have to try some, then.' He reached for the pancakes and took two. Then he looked up at the boy.

'Teddy!' said Andromeda, aghast. 'You need to change back.'

The boy now had longish black hair, piercing black eyes, and an overlarge nose. What sold the look, however, was that when the guest scowled, so did the young host.

'I see why you need to do something, Andromeda,' said Snape, who spoke sternly but was more amused than he would admit. 'I found the charm. It's fairly simple. We can cast it after breakfast, and then a simple Reversio will do the trick whenever you need him to go to his normal looks.'

After clearing up the debris of breakfast, they went into the den and stood with the boy between them and said the incantation that activated the charm. Later, the boy played while Andromeda did laundry. Severus scanned through more of the other wizard's journals. He had hundreds of spells written down in them. Most were ones Snape already knew, but there were a few he did not, and they were surprising in their simplicity. Several would be quite useful.

They ate a quick lunch and then took young Ted to a nearby park. He played with young witches and wizards, his hair changing color every ten minutes, until Snape wasn't sure which child was the one he had come with. Andromeda thought she knew, but wasn't sure. They cast the Revealing Spell and found him on the swings.

'So why are you doing this?' she asked him as they sat on a bench and watched Teddy's hair turn from a sandy brown to ginger-red.

'I have just had this feeling, as though I owed it to everyone to do something good.'

'I suppose we all owe whatever good we can do for each other. Our duty to our fellow man and all that.'

'No, it's just that I've done so many bad things...' Here he was cut off by quiet laughter.

'What bad things have you done that were of your own volition?'

He had to think. There were so many things, but they were all at the behest of one master or the other, and occasionally both. He nodded, having finally found one. 'I called someone I loved a "Mudblood". That was the event that set me on my path.'

'Did you regret it, though?'

'Every day since it happened.'

She nodded with a grim smile. 'I think you will find that most people will forgive you. The trick is that you will have to let them forgive you.'

'What about you?'

'Were you with the Snatchers who killed Ted? Did you hold the wand of my sister when she killed my daughter? Have you done anything that actually hurt me or any of my family?'

'No, but...'

Her voice sounded tired. 'Could you have stopped any of it?'

'No, but...'

'I've tried to let it go, Severus. You should, too.'

He watched the children play and thought about it. So many people had their lives broken and ruined by the war. Perhaps he wasn't trying to apologize so much as trying to put something good into a world that had seen too much trouble.

'I can see why such a charm is useful,' said Severus as they walked back to the cottage.

'Thank you for finding it and helping me with it.'

'You're welcome.'

They sat on a couch in the family room. 'Do you really think it's as simple as letting it all go?'

She let out a half laugh. He was reminded of her cousin Sirius. He realized that Black was another person who had aged too much too soon because of the war. 'I think that those who realize what you were really doing have long since forgiven you any perceived wrongs. I'm not sure that those who haven't yet are going to remove the blinders from their eyes until you're dead or at least out of sight. That's what my experience has taught me.'

'There's a lot to recover from, for all of us. When you've finished figuring out why you're doing what you're doing, you need to move on. Perhaps you should go someplace where you're out of the eye of Wizarding England. You should find a girl, maybe get married and have kids of your own. You've spent twenty years living for the sake of the rest of us. It's time for you to look to your own future.'

'I know I was going to stay for the week, but we seem to have solved the problem.'

'Yes, we have.'

'Do you mind, then, if I leave now? I have some things I could attend to and potions to brew. I could always come back if it turns out this didn't work.'

'That would be fine, Severus. Don't let us keep you.'

He stood by the door a bit awkwardly. She smiled as she had when he'd arrived the previous evening. 'Thank you again, and farewell, Severus Snape.'

He shook her hand solemnly. 'Thank you, Andromeda Tonks. Somehow I feel like you've helped me more than I've helped you.'

She reached over and pulled him into a hug. 'Just my duty to my fellow man and all that,' she said with a twinkle in her eye. He was surprised to find himself returning the hug.

Severus stopped at a coffee house he knew to think for a bit. Andromeda's comments had been unsettling. After he made his purchase, he looked for a spot to sit down and was surprised to see a familiar face.

'So it didn't upset you that Teddy copied your look?' Hermione asked after he had described his day to her.

'No, it was actually amusing to see my forty-three-year-old face on a five-year-old.'

'You should see him do Harry or Kingsley,' she laughed.

He fingered his cup. 'Andromeda had some interesting insights. She made me think that I'm looking at this all wrong, that perhaps I don't need forgiveness so much as a chance to just get out there and help people.'

'Why don't you tell me about it?' she asked.

'Do you have the time?'

'Certainly.'

Prompt words used: incarnadine, mother, Hogwarts, laboratory

A/N: Thanks to WriterMerrin for the beta reading and to my team mates for their thoughts and ideas.

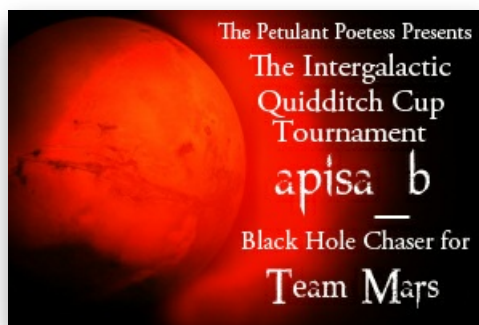
Thank you to everyone who has read. Please drop us a line and tell us what you think! And vote in the LJ poll:

<http://community.livejournal.com/potterplace/137404.html>

apisa_b - Black Hole Chaser

Chapter 4 of 7

Neville has a problem, which leads him to face his biggest fear.



Hermione was standing on the landing of a narrow staircase at number twelve, Grimmauld Place when a loud knock on the front door reverberated through the house. Out of deeply ingrained habit, she flew down the stairs, hands outstretched towards the place where two moth-eaten curtains used to shield the portrait of Walburga Black - or rather the world from the portrait. When she registered that the curtains hadn't moved and the old hag hadn't started her tirade of abusive words, a sigh of relief escaped her lips.

Hermione's thoughts kept wandering towards the very man every inhabitant of the old house wanted to thank down on their knees, and who currently kept tongues wagging: Severus Snape. Taking guesses on the reasons that had brought on the drastic change in his behaviour seemed to be the topmost activity at every gathering Hermione had been part of in the last couple of weeks. Opinions ranged from a Brain Befuddlement Charm to Severus Snape having fallen in love, which some people put on the same level.

Hermione's own opinion, readily dismissed by all, tended towards Severus Snape not having changed at all, but just breaking free of habits he'd had to adopt in order to maintain the illusion of being a Death Eater or probably him seeing no need to show his classroom persona anymore, now that he had quit his position at Hogwarts. After all, what teacher didn't put on a mask when dealing with their pupils? Minerva McGonagall had relayed many anecdotes from her long career as a teacher during the nights they spent carousing together. Many situations Hermione remembered, and she was totally sure her teacher had been furious; she was rather astonished to learn that half of the time Minerva'd had a hard time not erupting in bursts of laughter in front of her students. Why should it be different with Severus Snape? Why shouldn't he have put up a show of sour disposition, anger and favouritism for the sake of maintaining discipline in a subject where fooling around could lead to disastrous results, and of course maintaining his cover towards the pure-bloods? Probably the Severus Snape they saw now was the real one, the one who had to stay put beneath too many exterior layers.

'Mistress Hermione? Master Longbottom is here to see you.' Kreacher's words pulled Hermione out of her thoughts.

Hermione glanced up and saw Neville standing behind the old house-elf, grinning broadly.

'Thank you, Kreacher. Could you please bring us some tea into the library?'

'Kreacher will, Mistress. And some biscuits too,' the house-elf muttered, already on his way to the kitchen.

As soon as Kreacher was out of sight, Hermione gave up all pretence and threw herself into Neville's arms.

'God, it's good to see you! Where have you been? Do you realise it's been months without as much as a word about what you were up to?' Hermione said breathlessly as soon as Neville let her down from the full swing he had lifted her into, as if she were nothing but a child. It was hard to reconcile the tall, handsome and suntanned young man in front of her with the insecure, bumbling boy she remembered from her time at Hogwarts.

'I've had such an exciting time, and I'd wished more than once that you could have been there,' he told her as they walked towards the library.

'How so? I'm not particularly fond of the field work a Herbologist has to do, as you well know.'

'Not much of an outdoor girl, are you?' Neville chuckled.

'I've had enough outdoor experience for a lifetime during the time I was on the run with the boys, thank you very much,' Hermione retorted dryly.

'I'll take your word for it.'

They settled down into the plush chairs, and Hermione poured them tea.

'Those biscuits really look delicious. Don't hold it against me if I tuck in. I feel like I have been living off nothing else but Cornish Pasties and Fish and Chips these past few weeks,' Neville said as he reached for a cookie. He closed his eyes and leaned back against the back of his chair, sighing in delight as he savoured one.

'Why, was Heslop working you so hard you couldn't find time for a proper meal?'

'We were given access to the Royal Botanical Gardens of Kew for a limited time only, and we wanted to make the most of it. They have a lot of old magical seeds in their seedbank. We were allowed to grow them in a protected area, to work out the changes some of the plants have undergone in the last hundreds of years. In addition, access to their library was granted. Of course, that's when I wanted you to be there. Their collection of botanical books and illustrations is vast including a lot of rather old magical texts.'

'Oh, I've heard about it. To be allowed to peruse such old texts would be wonderful. My kind of holiday,' Hermione said with a dreamy look.

'Some of the old manuscripts cross-referenced to texts located at Windsor Castle and of course the name of Heslop Harrison opened the doors.'

'You mean the Royal Library contains magical texts?'

'Well, of course. Several Wizards married into the Royal Houses and have put their marks there. Elizabeth I founded not only the library but the magical section in Windsor Castle, and Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg added to its vast collection as well.'

'Uh, really? The husband of Queen Victoria was a wizard?' Hermione asked incredulously.

'It is not commonly known, even among pure-bloods,' Neville answered. 'But you might see how I barely managed to find the time to visit my parents. So please excuse my lack of correspondence.'

'Granted. But only because you have a good excuse this time, having worked so sedulously,' she teased him.

'It won't happen again, ma'am.'

'How are your parents?'

'Not so good. Since the Battle, they seem to be plagued by nightmares and are wasting away. The Healers vetting them think that they were affected worse than the rest of us by the dark energy Voldemort's death has set free.'

'I'm sorry to hear that.'

With a shudder, Hermione remembered the vivid nightmares that had plagued her in the weeks following Voldemort's demise.

'Which brings me to the reason of my visit.'

Hermione only arched her eyebrows while taking a sip of her tea.

Neville reached into his robe pocket and pulled out a roll of parchment.

'This is a copy of an old potion recipe. I found it at Windsor, and it might help to ease my parents' condition.'

Intrigued, Hermione edged closer.

'It's in Latin,' she exclaimed, surprised.

'Yes. Well, thanks to a Translation Spell, I was able to understand what it is about. It was written down in Germany in the Middle Ages and describes the effects the potion has.'

'Such as?'

'It counteracts depression. It's a sedative. It helps when you can't sleep. It prevents nightmares,' Neville was ticking the effects off on his fingers. 'And it has almost no side-effects.'

'What do the Healers say?'

'That's the problem. We weren't able to identify the vital ingredient. I was counting on you here. Have you ever heard of a plant called "Herba Dei" - "God's Herb"?'

'Called that in medieval Germany?'

'Yes,' Neville nodded with an unhappy look on his face.

'I have no clue. But I think I know just the man to ask.'

Neville's face lit up. 'Who?'

'Severus Snape.'

'I feared you might say that.'

'Come on, Neville. Give him some credit. He's a brilliant Potioneer with incredible knowledge. If someone has heard about your plant, it is him.'

Neville was looking at her with puppy eyes. 'Are you going to ask him for me?'

'Don't tell me you are still afraid of him!'

Neville nodded. 'Have a Boggart somewhere in the house so I can prove my fear?'

'For heaven's sake, Neville, you slaughtered Voldemort's scary snake, but are afraid of asking Snape a favour?'

One glance at Neville's frowning face was answer enough.

'You know what? I'll arrange for you to meet him here for tea. I think it's about time to be doing something about that Boggart of yours.'

'Tchotchkes,' he muttered under his breath.

'I beg your pardon?'

'He keeps a lot of tchotchkes around this room.' At Hermione's blank look, Severus Snape swept his arm towards the mantelpiece cluttered with memorabilia of Harry Potter's time at Hogwarts, Teddy Tonks's toys and cheerful pictures.

'Yes, he does. I think it is because he wasn't allowed to have how did you call them tchotchkes around his childhood home. At least with them, the room looks lived-in.'

Kreacher announcing the arrival of Neville Longbottom spared Severus Snape the comment he was about to make, which probably was for the best.

Hermione and Snape turned towards the door where Neville Longbottom, seemingly regressed from a self-assured scientist to a blushing first-year, stood. Flooded with pity for her friend, Hermione was about to cross the space and pull him into the room when she noticed that Severus Snape had beat her to it.

'Mr. Longbottom! The thorn in the side of that scum who called themselves "teachers" during my stint as headmaster, what a pleasure,' Severus Snape said while he gripped Neville's hand. 'You very nearly made up for your many potions ... eh, let's call them mishaps, with that.' Snape's voice had dropped with the last words, and for a fleeting moment his face showed the all-too-familiar sneer.

Neville's blush had faded to pallor in the meantime, leaving only two red spots high on his cheekbones. The looks he threw towards Hermione were pleading for help.

'To top that off, I heard you got rid of that beast that nearly killed me. Thank you, Mr. Longbottom. I should have said that long ago, but ...'

The sheepish grin and the casual shrug that probably should have passed as an apology for not having given his thanks earlier threw not only Hermione off balance. Neville seemed to have gone into shock and, without resistance, let himself be led into the library, seated on the sofa and handed a cup of tea.

'Uhm, Mr. Snape,' Hermione said to gain his attention and give her friend room to recover. 'Neville has found this old potion recipe, and we wondered ...'

Taking the parchment out of her hands, he skimmed the content. 'Should not be a problem for you to brew, Ms. Granger. So why ... Oh, yes, Saint-John's-wort harvested at the solstice might be hard to come by.'

'So Saint-John's-wort is this Herba dei?' Hermione asked, relief seeping through her words. Now that she knew what plant they needed, she was sure the potion could be brewed.

'Is this potion for Mr. Longbottom's parents?'

Still unable to speak, Neville only nodded.

'Better to use the German subspecies then. I know where to get it. It might take me a couple of days to obtain it, though.'

Turning towards Hermione, Snape said, 'Care to brew with me, Ms. Granger? I already have a few ideas how to improve this.'

Taking the wide grin spreading across her face as consent, he left with the promise of contacting her as soon as he managed to obtain the missing ingredient.

'You know what, Hermione? A friendly Snape is even scarier than a scowling one,' Neville said before taking a long draught from his cup of tea.

The prompt words given for this week were: vet - Windsor Castle - Cornish Pasties - tchotchke - antidote - sedulous - exterior

A/N: Kudos to Luvsev and WriterMerrin for their beta-work.

Don't forget to place a vote on Potter Places's LJ community!

[Here](#), to be specific.

kingphilipswench - Gravity Keeper

Chapter 5 of 7

At Draco's suggestion, Severus decides to make amends to some of the people struggling in the aftermath of the war. In the process, he restores old friendships and makes new ones.



Severus downed his drink and scowled at the empty glass.

Longbottom. He shuddered.

At least the potion won't be too difficult to brew, assuming I can clear out a space at Spinner's End that hasn't been taken over by doxies. Hogwarts did have its benefits.

Motioning to Tom for another drink, he rubbed his face in frustration.

I think I'm actually sore from smiling. Who gets sore from smiling?

Molly Weasley entered the Leaky on her way into Diagon Alley; Severus slouched down further in his chair and tried to make himself invisible.

I've used up my daily allowance of pleasantness. Possibly my annual reserves as well.

The fates, as usual, were against him.

'Severus!' She bustled over to him as he scowled again at his empty glass. Tom caught his eye and brought the bottle over.

'Hello, Mrs. Weasley.'

'It's a bit early for that, isn't it?'

'I had tea with Neville Longbottom today and sent him into shock. I view it as a medicinal necessity.'

She plopped down in the chair opposite without waiting for an invite.

Realizing he would, in fact, now have to make conversation, he sighed and rolled his eyes.

'And what brings you to the Leaky Cauldron, Mrs. Weasley?'

'You can call me Molly, you know. We've only known each other for over twenty years.'

'Fine. Molly. What brings you to the Leaky Cauldron?'

'Supply run into Diagon Alley. The repairs we did following the Death Eater attack were rather slapdash, I'm afraid. Things are falling apart at the Burrow again. I'm out of Spellotape, among other things.'

Snape squeezed his eyes shut.

'You're not attempting to repair your domicile with Spellotape, are you?'

'Of course not. Not the structural parts, anyway. I just need Spellotape for the smaller items. It's all I can work on right now, anyway. I'm several men short for repairs: Ron and George have been busy at the shop, and Charlie can't get away from Romania. Bill helps Arthur in the evenings and on weekends.'

'What about Percy?'

Molly gave Severus a wry look. 'Percy is... less than helpful when it comes to manual labour.'

Severus felt the hands of fate prick the hairs on the back of his neck.

'I'll be there at ten tomorrow.'

'What? That wasn't a request for you to come do it, Severus. I was just explaining why I need Spellotape.'

'But you need help. And I am available. I will be there at ten tomorrow.'

Molly frowned. She really hadn't meant to guilt Severus into helping them rebuild the Burrow.

'Well... if you insist.'

'I do.'

^^^

Severus arrived at ten, exactly, dressed in Muggle jeans and a thick work shirt. Molly gave him a tour of the house: broken beams, holes knocked through walls, leaking thatched roof... and he wasn't sure if the foundation of it was stable at all. It had always been a bit dodgy, as far as he could recall, living space stacked upon living space haphazardly as it had been added as needed, usually in a rush.

'We did a number on this place, didn't we?'

'You didn't do it personally, Severus.'

'Perhaps. But I'm just as responsible. Molly, I don't think the foundation is stable. Let me see if I can find an engineer to come take a look before we start disturbing anything that is going to fall in on you.'

'Really, Severus, it's not necessary for you to go to all this trouble...'

The look he gave her cut her off and she fell silent. He stalked off into the yard and Apparated away.

^^^

'Mistress Hermione? Master Snape is here to see you,' Kreacher informed her. She was surprised; she'd not been expecting Severus to stop by. Closing the tome she'd been reading, she found Severus waiting for her in the sitting room. Her eyes widened at his attire: jeans, a work shirt black, of course and boots.

'Hello, Mr. Snape. This is a pleasant surprise. What brings you to Grimmauld?'

'I was at the Burrow to help Molly with repairs, and I don't think the foundation of the structure is safe. Do you know any Wizarding engineers who could come take a look?'

Hermione thought for a moment and then smiled.

'Terry Boot is an engineer. And it so happens, he owes me a favor. I'll Floo him and see if he's free.'

'I don't want you to have to use up your favor with Mr. Boot on my account.'

'I don't mind, Mr. Snape. Really. If it makes you feel more balanced, though, you can owe me in turn. You can, in fact, do the same thing for me that I did for Terry.'

A raised eyebrow was her response. She giggled.

'You can go to a family function with me next weekend to keep my relatives at bay.'

'Your relatives at bay?'

'Do you have a boyfriend? When are you getting married? You're going to die an old maid...' Hermione mimicked in a high-pitched voice.

'Ah. And you did that for Mr. Boot?'

'Yes, his parents think he should get married quickly, and he's obsessed with helping making sure everything is put to rights from the war. Let me Floo him and see what he says.'

She ducked into the sitting room Floo and came out a few minutes later.

'He'll be here in five minutes. I think he needed a break from Percy mismanaging him at the Ministry.'

A few minutes later, Terry Boot tumbled out of the Floo. Dusting himself off, his eyes widened when he saw Severus.

'Snape!'

'Yes.'

'Sorry, sir, you startled me.'

'Terry, Mr. Snape needs you to look at the foundation of the Burrow and see if it's structurally sound.'

He looked surprised, but recovered himself quickly.

'Lead the way, Mr. Snape.'

^^^

Severus was impressed with Terry's efficiency and professionalism. He went through the Burrow and made lists of everything that needed to be done to the foundation. After about two hours, he turned to Severus.

'Mr. Snape, this is going to take some work. I've made a list of things that need to be done, but there's manual labor as well. I'm going to go get Justin and Blaise and see if they can join us.'

Severus was taken aback; Terry simply jumped in with no thought about the fact that it wasn't even his project or responsibility.

'So... more hands would be optimum?'

'Yes, in addition to the wand work, you're going to need some people to physically move stuff while we work.'

'I'll see what I can do. Shall we meet back here in an hour?'

'That sounds fine, I'm sure Justin and Blaise will want to escape from whatever monotonous thing they're working on.'

^^^

Back at Grimmauld, Severus pondered who to ask help him while explaining the situation to Hermione.

'I'll come, of course. What about Gregory? Or Adrian?'

'I'll come, too. I'm ashamed to admit that I hadn't even thought that the Burrow might be still in a state of destruction,' Harry chimed in.

'Right. So I'll Floo Gregory and Adrian, and then we'll all meet at the Burrow in an hour?'

'Agreed.'

Severus sneered. It was bloody annoying that two-thirds of the Golden Trio still answered in unison.

^^^

Molly was cautiously pleased when a mob of people, including Adrian Pucey, Blaise Zabini, and Gregory Goyle, who'd brought his girlfriend Millicent, arrived at her house to put the Burrow to rights. Terry Boot took charge of the project, and everyone fell into line, recognizing his brilliance with magical structures. Severus handled the assignments for the physical labor based on Terry's recommendations, and Hermione and Harry, for once, did what he said.

As Hermione and Severus fitted a wall into place, Hermione snuck glances at him. He was surprisingly strong; while she'd never thought that Severus was a weakling, his thin build didn't lend itself to being synonymous with brute strength. On the other hand, people probably also thought the same of her.

'The Herbal dei should be ready tomorrow. But I've hit a snag,' he said suddenly.

'What's that?'

'My lab at Spinner's End is in quite a state of disuse. I'm afraid that my years of having access to the finest lab Hogwarts could supply rather spoiled me.'

'Easily remedied. There's an adequate lab at Grimmauld.'

'And you'll allow me to use it?'

Hermione rolled her eyes.

'No, Mr. Snape, I just mentioned it in a moment of gloating.'

He stared.

'Yes, idiot man, you may use my lab. You may even steal supplies out of my storeroom, should you be so inclined.'

A chuckle escaped him, and he almost smiled.

'You should smile more.'

'I can't, I'm already sore from dealing with Mr. Longbottom yesterday.'

'Then you should practice so you don't get sore anymore.'

'They'll just cart me off to St. Mungo's. I will bring the Herbal dei tomorrow.'

'Cool.'

'Did you just use slang with me?'

'Yes.'

'Hmpf.'

^^^

By the time everything was said and done, it was evening. Arthur, Percy, Ron, and George had arrived home and been flabbergasted to find that not only had a large group of people invaded the Burrow (a fairly standard occurrence) but almost all of the repairs had been finished. Molly fixed a late supper, and things took on a party atmosphere. Severus gazed around him, taking in the sight of Justin Finch-Fletchly passing a turret of gravy to Millicent Bulstrode and Blaise laughing at a joke Ron had just told. Terry, Percy, Adrian, and Hermione were talking amiably, but that was to be expected; they were all brilliant.

What an odd turn of events.

Keeping with the party atmosphere, Arthur put some Muggle music on. It came out of a box that he called a sea-dee player. He'd apparently charmed it to work without 'ekletricity.' Everyone moved into the expanded living area and continued chatting as if they hadn't been at each other's throats in a past life.

'Severus, could you get some more white wine out of the cellar?'

'Certainly, Molly.'

I knew the day couldn't be this good forever.

'Argh! This is worse than that time I caught Draco and Marietta Edgecombe in the Prefect's bathroom. Gregory! Millicent! Put on your clothes. Just because the Weasleys breed like rabbits doesn't mean you have to follow their lead.'

Retrieving two bottles of sauvignon blanc, he bolted back upstairs and poured himself a glass, trying to wash away the sight that had greeted him when he opened the cellar door. He felt someone touch his elbow.

'You do realize that this is a very good thing you've caused today, don't you?'

He raised an eyebrow at Hermione.

'Yes, peace, love, and happiness, thy name is Severus. Now, perhaps you could give me the details about this date we're supposed to go on next weekend.'

Smugly pleased when Ron started choking on his drink, he smiled and found his face wasn't sore, after all.

A/N: Words used: storeroom, Prefect's bathroom, Spellotape. Um...author's notes... author's notes... author's notes... First I want thank Pan the Goat God for making it all possible. Next, me mum and dad for teaching me how to read and write. Finally, I want to thank Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II for... you know... running England and stuff. Of course thanks to the team for giving this a read through... um... GO TEAM MARS!

Javoher - Moon Chaser

Chapter 6 of 7

At Draco's suggestion, Severus decides to make amends to some of the people struggling in the aftermath of the war. In the process, he restores old friendships and makes new ones.



With a small *pop!* Severus Snape Apparated into the alley next to twelve, Grimmauld Place. Straightening his cloak, he mounted the steps and knocked on the door. Kreacher opened it immediately.

'Miss is telling Kreacher to wait by the door,' grumbled Kreacher under his breath as he shut the door behind Severus and took his cloak. 'Miss is saying she and the Professor have important work.'

'That's right,' Severus replied. 'And I must be getting on with it. Where is Miss Granger?'

'Basement, sir,' said Kreacher as he led Severus down the hall and to the kitchen, still grumbling. He opened the door to the basement at the back wall and pungent steam billowed through it.

Severus entered the house's potions lab, immediately seeing his young friend. 'Miss Granger,' he called.

Hermione straightened up in surprise. 'Oh, good, you're here! I just finished preparing the second base as you asked, and the ingredients are ready.' She gestured to the worktable behind her, where slabs of marble and wood held several shredded and diced herbs and plants.

'Excellent,' Severus grunted and pulled out the jar of Herbal Dei. Placing it upon the table with the other ingredients, he then inspected her work.

The steam and smoke from the fires wafted towards the vents in the back wall. Hermione was dressed in a loose sleeveless shirt and loose pants, her hair bound on top of her head, curls escaping their clips, sweat beading on her brow. Severus made a concentrated effort not to look at how the material clung to her as she watched him closely and asked several questions, to which he did her the honor of giving her decent answers.

Finally he was satisfied. 'It'll do, Miss Granger,' he said. 'Now we begin the trickier part.'

'I thought you said it wouldn't be hard!' Hermione replied.

'It isn't, if you're a Potions master,' Severus said with a smirk. 'Start with the first base. Bring the diced weeds from the bottom of the Serpentine, then thin the Glumbumble parts with the pure alcohol.'

And with that, they bent to their work.

Hours later, the brew in the cauldron glowed in a violet haze, surrounded by a yellow stasis charm. Sweat poured down Hermione's back, causing her shirt to stick. Severus had spent the last hour doing his level best to avoid looking at her long, curved back and her rounded hips below it; his temper was frayed from the strain.

'That is enough for now,' he snapped at Hermione. She looked at him in surprise. 'The brew must cool for a day before we can bottle it. Potter's house-elf can take care of the cauldrons.'

'Then I'm for tea and sandwiches,' Hermione replied cheerfully. She ascended the stairs, Severus on her heels. Gratefully they emerged into the cooler kitchen. Severus sat while Hermione efficiently took food from the larder and put the kettle on with a flick of her wand.

'What's this?' asked Hermione absently when she'd sat down and dug in. She picked up the roll of parchment from under the pile of post. 'Why, it's from Luna!' she exclaimed. Avidly she read through as Severus watched her from behind a lock of hair. Her face fell at the end, and she sighed.

'Her...er, Miss Granger? Is something amiss?' he asked.

'You remember Luna Lovegood, I assume?' she explained. 'The Ravenclaw who kept losing her shoes?'

'Indelibly,' Severus replied dryly. 'Is she well?'

'Yes, but she's very concerned about her father. She fears this time he simply can't repair the thing. He's just convinced they could expand their readership to what it was before the war if they could just get it working properly. Thing is, it was second-hand when they bought it many years ago, and the repairs they made after the house blew up just aren't holding like they need to.' Hermione stopped as Severus looked at her in amazement. She returned his look tremulously, her lower lip caught in her teeth. 'I don't suppose... that is, it would be terribly presumptuous of me, but... do you think you could...?'

'Could I do what?' asked Severus, trying manfully to mask his impatience. 'You haven't even told me what 'it' is.'

'Could you help the Lovegoods to repair their printing press?' asked Hermione in a rush. 'I know it's a lot to ask, but *The Quibbler* was such a big help to us when no one else would believe Harry. Do at least say you'll think about it, Mr. Snape?' Her big brown eyes held a spark of hope.

Severus put down his tea. Of course he would help; it was what he did these days, and especially when looked at in *that* way by *this* witch. It was just that Xenophilius Lovegood was a man to be taken in small doses.

'You may tell Miss Lovegood that I will be there at ten o'clock tomorrow morning, if it is convenient,' he said finally.

'Oh, Severus! Thank you!' cried Hermione, and she launched herself out of her chair at him. Severus grunted in surprise to find warm arms around his neck, a feminine body pressed against him, and a delicate scent in his nose. He decided that he was not averse to this proceeding.

'Right, well then,' murmured Hermione as she disengaged herself, spots of color high on her cheekbones. 'I do beg your pardon, Mr. Snape, I was a little overwhelmed.'

'Not at all, Miss Granger,' Severus replied with as much nonchalance as he could muster. 'Now if you'll excuse me, I do have other matters to attend to before I visit the Lovegoods.'

'Of course, Mr. Snape,' said Hermione politely, her eyes gleaming with good humor. 'So I'll see you day after tomorrow?'

'Yes, yes, I'll be here,' Severus replied. And with that he took his leave, quite pleased that he had spent a day with Hermione Granger's undivided attention.

At precisely ten o'clock the next morning, Severus appeared at the bottom of the hill where the Lovegoods resided. A pretty gate opened to a lane with flowers on either side which wound up and away from a stream. A short walk later, Severus knocked on the bright green door.

Luna answered promptly. 'Professor!' she said with her dreamy smile. 'We're so happy to see you.'

'Good morning, Miss Lovegood,' Severus replied stiffly. 'Did Miss Granger inform you of my intended visit today?'

'Oh yes, we got her owl this morning,' Luna said. 'It's so very kind of you to take time to look at our little problem, especially when you've got so much to do for Neville's parents.'

'Indeed,' replied Snape.

Suddenly there was a clattering from above, causing the walls to creak and shudder. Then a loud *BOOM!* restored peace for a mere moment before thick, black smoke began to curl through the cracks in the ceiling as a loud exclamation resounded from upstairs.

'Oh dear,' said Luna with a sigh, opening the windows with a practiced flick of her wand. 'My father was trying a new oiling charm this morning to keep the rolls of parchment from grinding together. Doesn't seem to be working. I told him I think there are doxies in it, so I'm making more doxycide.' She went to the bottom of the stairs and shouted up them, 'Daddy! Professor Snape's here!'

Boots made noise over their heads, then Xenophilus Lovegood stomped down the stairs. 'Ah, Snape!' he cried, extending his hand cheerfully. 'Just the man we need. My Luna told me her friends would ask your assistance.'

'Mr. Lovegood,' Snape replied. 'My pleasure. What seems to be the trouble?'

'It's the blessed printing press. It took a beating when Death Eaters attacked the house that one time Luna's friends came to call. I tried to put it back together, but it didn't work quite properly. Been limping along ever since. And now, it's giving up the ghost.' Shaking his head, Xenophilus turned and led the way up the stairs.

At the top was the machine, belching black smoke as a groan came from its depths. The parchment roller jerked back and forth, trying to roll forward and failing miserably. Severus bent to examine it as the movable type chattered. 'Well, let's get to it then,' he said and lifted his wand.

In no time he and Xenophilus had the covers off. The gears were examined and twisted, the excess oil was Evanesco'ed, the belts tested and repaired. Severus cast several Revealing charms on the inner springs and found the Perpetual Motion spells on the shafts had frayed as well. The two of them cast new spells, lubricated joints, replaced drums, and cleaned up the ink wells.

Finally, four hours and twelve Cushioning Charms later, the machine was ready. Xenophilus raised his wand and cried, '*Ennervate!*' With a hum, the printing press came back to life. The giant roll of parchment fed through one end, the magical metal quills made the words appear on the page, the cutters cut and the folders folded. Shortly, a stack of newspapers began to grow at the end of the line.

'Well, that looks to be in working order now,' said Severus thoughtfully, checking a level on the container of Occam's Everlasting Oil.

'Too right it is,' said Xenophilus, pleased as punch. 'Can't thank you enough. Don't know what we would have done otherwise.'

Severus nodded his head. 'My pleasure, Xenophilus.'

'You'll receive your copy of *The Quibbler* by post in the morning,' said Xenophilus, his eyes on the machine and his wild white hair bobbing in time with the rollers. 'Free of charge, of course.' He gave the stack of newspapers a brilliant smile.

'I... look forward to it,' replied Snape. 'Now since that machine is in proper form, I'd better get going.'

And with that they descended the stairs, Luna showing him out the door with a happy wave.

The next morning Severus was feeling a little overwhelmed. Arthur Weasley had sent him notes about the continuing remodel of his house, Neville Longbottom had sent him updates on his parents' condition, Andromeda Tonks had sent him messages from Teddy Lupin and letters of her own, and Draco demanded weekly correspondence. By the time he arrived at Grimmauld Place, he was in a temper.

'Now what is it?' asked Hermione after she'd settled him in the library with his usual cuppa.

'I had a lot of post to attend to this morning, is all,' Severus grouched into his cup.

'Then I have just the thing to cheer you up,' said Hermione brightly. 'The potion is in perfect order, according to the books.'

'Hmh,' grunted Severus. 'I'll be the judge of that.' They descended to the potions lab. Indeed the cauldron was just the right temperature, and the potion inside had darkened to a medicinal shade of violet-black. He poured it into the bottles and sealed the glass stoppers.

'This should do it,' he said. 'I'm off to St. Mungo's.'

Hermione looked at him. 'I can't thank you...WE can't thank you enough,' she said softly. 'Neville, Luna, the Weasleys, Tonks's mum... their lives are better because of you.' She smiled at him. 'And you have the generosity to accompany me to a Muggle wedding.'

'A-a wedding?' echoed Severus. Her eyes were big and brown, and he was drowning in them. 'Yes, of course I'll go to a wedding with you.'

'Next Saturday, then,' Hermione said. 'At four o'clock.'

It wasn't until much later, at St. Mungo's watching Neville and the nurse administer the potions to the Longbottoms, that he began to wonder what he'd got himself into.

A/N: Words used: Doxycide, Glumbumble Parts, The Serpentine, stream.

Many thanks to writermerrin and her extreme patience with my fumbles, and the team for great suggestions.

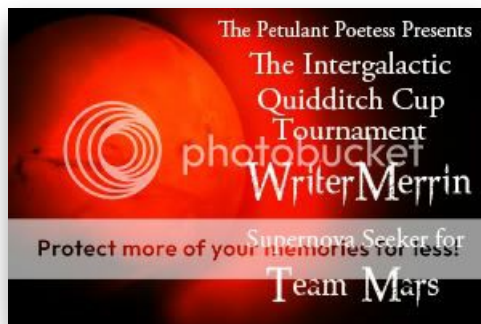
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WriterMerrin - Supernova Seeker

Chapter 7 of 7

Severus accompanies Hermione to a family wedding, and they both learn a little about themselves.



Even though they'd not had plans to see each other before Saturday, Hermione had been pleased to bump into Severus at St. Mungo's on Thursday evening. The Longbottoms seemed much more at peace than they had the previous week, and Severus estimated that doses twice daily for five more days should permanently purge much of the residual dark magic plaguing them. He was even speculating on some alternative treatments for some of the other symptoms.

She thought that she shouldn't have been surprised to find Severus in the thick of things. While he and Neville could still barely stand each other, he seemed to be engaged in serious conversation with a Healer regarding research and development.

When she turned to leave, Severus offered to accompany her out. They wandered down the street in the twilight, turning at a pillar box and ducking into a suitable alley.

'Have you eaten?' Severus asked, standing a little closer in the shadows than he would have in view of the street.

'I'm afraid so,' Hermione answered. 'But we could go for coffee.'

'I believe I know the place,' Severus answered with what might have been a teasing lilt. 'Mind if I...?' He punctuated the partial question by offering her his arm.

Smiling, she looped one arm through his and held on with the other. Looking up into his face as he prepared to Apparate, she reflected that adult witches were not supposed to find anything thrilling in side-along Apparation. When he steadied her on her feet at their destination, she remembered why; it could be quite uncomfortable, but she felt that a brief dizzy spell was a small price to pay for close contact with Severus' strong arms and chest.

Despite her distracting feelings, she thought that she managed to carry her coffee to a table and sit in the seat he pulled out for her without showcasing her preoccupation with her companion. With Severus going out of his way to help so many people, it almost seemed silly to think that he was singling her out. She halted that train of thought by asking him about his conversation with the Healer.

'It seems word of my "new leaf" has reached the human resources department. Apparently, there might be work for me doing Potions research.'

'That does sound promising. Would you work at the hospital?'

'At this point, I have the option of a laboratory on their premises or applying for a grant to establish my own someplace and contracting for them.'

'Why, that sounds absolutely brilliant! Do you think you will?'

'The possibility of my own location is quite enticing. I must admit that I resigned from the school without a clear idea of where I would go from there. Not very characteristic of me, I know, but it seemed the right thing to do, and I can live off my savings for a while yet before I need to worry.' He suddenly stopped and appeared to be examining her face. 'What are you doing now that you've completed your Arithmancy program?'

'Well, publication of my dissertation got me just enough for a down payment on the flat, and my parents insisted that I take a proper holiday this summer before getting to work.'

'And you've spent it in that old house?'

'Well, besides brewing with you, I've been helping Ginny with the baby.' Hermione instinctively didn't use James' name.

'And when you are no longer in the childcare industry?'

'Maybe I'll try independent contracting, too. Arithmancy and charms aren't disciplines that require a lot of overhead, so it is just as easy to innovate from home.'

'How are you at combining Arithmancy with Potions?'

'It wasn't my top discipline, but I am a fast learner.' She thoughtfully sipped the last of her coffee. 'You know, I don't think I'm going to need the dining room in my new flat. I wonder what it would take to certify the room potions-safe instead.'

'Does it have a window?'

'Yes.'

'Then don't bother the builders. I can likely make the modifications and certify it myself.'

'Well, we'll hold that option in reserve for the time being, then.'

The next evening she went shopping with her mother. Her cousin's wedding would not have occasioned a new dress, but something in the way Severus had peered at her over his cup of coffee Thursday night had made it imperative that she make a good impression. She suddenly wanted their time together Saturday to be a date, and she was determined to catch his attention.

Before entering the Grimmauld Place house, she had pulled out her mobile and called her mum to arrange the emergency dress-shopping excursion. She took the opportunity of the shopping trip to get her mother up to speed. The Grangers had had their memories restored four years previous and had returned to England a year later. When Hermione had told them the whole story, she had been sure to dispute the way the *Prophet* had traduced Mr. Snape's character, but at the time he was not a potential...

Potential what? She had spent a little too much of Friday daydreaming about him to deny it by the time she Apparated to her parents' backyard. But she still needed to fine tune the story she was going to tell her relatives.

As she showered and slipped into her new red dress Saturday afternoon, she practiced saying his first name aloud. After all, it would seem strange to address a friend as formally as she'd made a habit of.

Not wanting to dillydally, she was waiting in the entryway, wrap in hand, when he arrived at precisely four that afternoon.

The reality of him in a Muggle black suit was beyond her idle daydreams. She had wanted to surprise him, but he had outdone himself.

She took a deep breath, but he spared her by speaking first.

'You are lovely, Hermione.'

She blushed and adjusted the strap on her purse. 'Thank you. I was wondering when you would finally take me up on the offer... Severus.'

He smiled a little and extended his elbow for her to take. By the time they reached the safe Apparation point, both were at ease.

'I don't know if I told you, but I'll be Apparating us to my parents' house, and we'll follow them in my mum's car.'

'You didn't, but the plan sounds acceptable.'

'Good,' Hermione answered and clutched his arm tighter as she concentrated on her parents' backyard.

As a dry run for the wedding, she introduced Severus as a colleague from the university. They were colleagues, and it made her smile inside to think of the collaborating they'd done in the past several weeks. The years when they hadn't had much contact had eased every classroom slight, and she was utterly enthralled by the man now standing beside her.

The church ceremony was blessedly brief, and they drove to the reception hall to munch on hors d'oeuvres while they waited for the wedding party.

She was relieved to see how at ease Severus was with her parents. Perhaps after a house full of Weasleys, three Grangers were easier to deal with.

After the meal came the barrage of relatives. Hermione knew that bringing Severus would be a calculated risk, but she hadn't counted on all of her aunts flirting with him. She couldn't help feeling pride when Severus swept from his chair and offered her his hand to dance. It may have only been to silence Aunt Clara, but moments later, nosy relatives were the last thing on her mind.

The song he'd chosen for their first dance was a light ballad, not too slow or sappy. He held her lightly, testing the limits of this new experience. The words made her smile, and his answering smile made her beam.

The next song was even slower, and she stepped into his arms so he would have no doubt what she wanted. He pulled his arms around her in a tender embrace, and she rested her head against the chest she'd long been fascinated with.

When he softly inquired if they could leave, she was quick to bid farewell to her parents and make her way back to the car. The tension was palpable as they pulled into the driveway, and they stood on her parents' front porch like teenagers for long moments until Hermione finally found words...any words.

'Do you want to see my new flat? It will be ready next week.'

'I'm sure Potter's elf is beside himself.'

'He's offered to pack all of my boxes just to get me out of there faster.'

'Would you like some help settling in?'

'That depends.'

'On what?'

'On why you're asking.'

'It is what I do.'

'No, not that again.'

'What do you mean?'

'I mean that the summer is half over. How long is this crusade of yours going to last?'

'As long as it takes.'

'You can't rebuild the entire Wizarding World any more than Terry can. And no one is asking you to.' She paused, but interrupted before he could voice the objections she saw on the tip of his tongue. 'No! Come because you want to unpack my library or see what our potential new potions space looks like. Come because you want to spend time with me... because you like me.'

In the suddenly awkward silence, Hermione lowered her gaze until she saw Severus' arm enter her line of vision.

'First it's "cool" and then "like"? Your vocabulary used to be more refined.'

'Well?'

'Well what?'

'Why do you want to help me move house?'

'Because I do esteem you and want to spend time with you. You spend enough of your own time helping other people; don't think I didn't notice.'

'But I've always done that.'

'Does that make it better? Are you the only one allowed to spend your whole life helping others? What are you trying to atone for?'

'Nothing! It's just...'

This time, his hand made it all the way to her shoulder. 'You've been telling me for weeks that it's okay to live for myself a little. What's keeping you from taking your own advice?'

'Living for myself would be lonely.'

'You won't be alone. I could be there, too.'

Her answer was barely a whisper. 'I'd like that.'

'As would I.'

He leaned down until his lips could brush hers. The hand on her shoulder made its way to the nape of her neck, where the slightest pressure prompted her to part her lips. And his kiss told her that neither of them needed to be lonely anymore.

Thanks to Karelia for beta reading, and a MILLION thanks to my teammates for giving me so much material for this final chapter.

Words used: dillydally, traduce, pillar box