

# Survivors of the War

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*Chapter 1 of 1*

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When she arrived on his doorstep a year after the war ended, he could not just turn her away, even though he wanted to.

Hermione Granger had changed a lot in the year following the war. Wars change people, he knew that. But he didn't expect it to change her. Her stubborn, valiant Gryffindor attitude should have held firm when the world around her crumbled and faltered. But instead, she crumbled and faltered with it.

And when she could no longer stand the celebrations, the so-called freedom, she came to him. She told him she knew that he, out of everyone, would be the same. The war had damaged him, certainly; but he was not destroyed, nor was he triumphant.

He had seen death, she told him solemnly. He had faced it and found it wanting. And she needed his strength and assurances that she was not going crazy.

Unfortunately, Snape was fairly certain she was.

She forgot herself a lot, forgot where she was and what she was in the middle of. She sometimes forgot to brush her hair for days in a row. She forgot to eat, shower, and she even forgot to go to sleep. She would stay up for days and only pass out when she could no longer control her wakefulness. She fell asleep at the kitchen table or over a potion, for which he scolded her and banned her from his personal lab.

She also hated to be touched, hated loud noises and fast movements. It was like living with a skittish animal that had been badly abused. He didn't have the patience or compassion to deal with her, but he just could not find the strength to drop her off at Potter's and forget about her. She had come to him, she who had mountains of friends and admirers, she who fought like a warrior against the Dark, she who was courageous and brave and good. She came to him.

She stayed in her own room and barely bothered him most days. She read a lot and tried to cook the Muggle way, and Severus was sure the pots and pans were in worse condition than a first-year student's cauldron. But when she managed a meal and fed them both, he sensed her satisfaction even if she did not smile, and for some damn reason that made it okay.

He tried to stay away from her, recognizing from the very beginning that he was drawn to her, drawn to her fragility and her pain. He felt like a Dementor, swooping in and feasting on her desperate unhappiness.

She clearly was not getting better, staying here in the dungeons, forgetting daylight and living inside her head.

But Snape was never good at putting people back together. Not even himself. So he let her swirl lower and lower, downwards into the darkness while he watched like a voyeur outside her window, never getting past the barrier but witnessing the seduction from the outside.

Her damage was sublime.

When Snape made love to her for the first time, it was she who initiated. It had been dirty and desperate, on the couch instead of the bed. They hadn't undressed, and it was over before Snape realized he should have paid more attention. Her body was tight and felt like a miracle and when she came it was like her orgasm was ripped from her against her will, like she didn't want to come because then she felt better, and she only wanted to feel pain.

He pulled himself from her and apologized. He wasn't sorry at all. He wanted to share her brokenness because it was beautiful, the way she just let it happen without trying to stop it, without trying to get better. She only shrugged and pulled her skirt down. He noticed she didn't shower or go to the bathroom for a while afterwards, and for a second he thought his come inside her with like glue keeping her together.

But then she did shower, and fell apart again.

They fell into an easy relationship, neither saying the words, barely saying any words at all. They slept in the same bed and fucked when the need arose. She always hated coming, but she didn't try to stop it. He felt her orgasms were like penance, that she was punishing herself for feeling something. He taught and she read, and when she didn't need him anymore, when she finally realized he was just as crazy as she was, she did not leave. She only said, "I wish you'd told me you couldn't help me."

He'd answered, "I didn't know. I wanted to."

"I know."

Harry, Ron and the others stopped by from time to time. Every minute was agony, and he could see her skin crawling while she faked normalcy. She was quite the actress. She knew all the right lines, only the delivery was a little off, a little stiff. Her friends, of course, did not notice.

They wondered why she was here with him, of all people, and she lied and said she was apprenticing. She hadn't touched a potion since she'd fallen asleep over one. They accepted the answer and the camaraderie between herself and Snape; after all, Snape was as much a hero as they were, and Hermione had always pleaded his case.

Better him than them, they thought, to put her pieces back in the box. There would be no finishing the puzzle, the best anyone could hope for was to find all the errant slivers and put the lid over them for the last time.

He fell into her world of self-delusion. Sometimes she said strange things like, "Did you ever wonder where it all went? The pain and suffering? It doesn't just blink out, it must have gone somewhere."

He didn't tell her he knew exactly where it went.

Another time, she asked him why she never felt anything anymore. She understood not feeling happy, but she missed feeling sad. She missed feeling.

He made love to her, but it only proved her point.

He was rude to her and hateful at times. He called her names and ordered her around. He couldn't distance himself from the teacher, and he lectured her all the time, on her work ethic, on the way she was letting her life slip away. On the way she fucked like she hated him.

She said she wished she did hate him, and he knew what she meant.

But as drawn as Snape was to her tragedy, he couldn't help but miss what she used to be. He remembered all too well the way she used to talk on for hours about her ideas and research, her theories. Her dreams for the future. Now the only dreams she had came at night and taunted her with their familiarity and semblance of pain, and yet were so far from the real thing.

Nothing changed; they remained in stasis, suspended animation, frozen in time with the world moving around them, transforming, growing.

And then one day Snape changed it all. He was wallowing in her self-destruction, watching her like a train wreck as she sat still for over an hour and did not even twitch, and suddenly he told her he loved her. He didn't qualify it by saying he loved her pain, or the way she used to be, and he didn't ask her to give it back. He knew she couldn't. But for whatever reason, he needed her to know he loved her despite her madness and possibly because of it. That she was loved and would be loved when there was nothing of the old Hermione left. He said he would love her empty shell and that he would make love to her when her mind was gone, tearing her orgasms out like teeth. He didn't care.

She said his love felt like torture, like barbed wire under her skin, like glass in her eyes. He only shrugged, knowing he couldn't change that.

But his love felt. She could feel it. And barbed wire was better than the void, and if the emptiness had to fill with razor blades, it was better than nothing. She told him as much, and he nodded gravely, vowing to make her hurt every day of her life if she wanted him to. To get her away from the nothing.

She didn't say she loved him back. She didn't. Couldn't. Couldn't say it, couldn't do it. But she let him fill her with sharpness until the edges dulled. He hurt her with his love every day, every soft kiss from his scratchy lips; every gentle caress from his stained fingers, every thrust of his punishing cock dulled the razors until they were just chunks of metal floating around within her.

Then with every birthday and Christmas and summer holiday they spent together, the chunks of metal melted and melded together, forming an iron ball inside her, a molten core around which she revolved like a planet, but it didn't burn her, it just was.

Every time he told her he loved her, he reached inside her and pulled out handfuls of molten metal, his skin flaying and melting from the heat. She burned him every time, but he took the metal away, making sure to leave pieces of himself behind. Where once there were razors, now there was Snape. His childhood he gave to her, his obedience he gave to her, his knowledge he gave to her. He sacrificed so much of himself she began to replace his missing pieces with her own.

So she gave him her pain, her survivor's guilt, her trauma and her loneliness. He took them gratefully and consumed them, turning them into more love for her. He recycled her pain and gave it back to her in the form of forgiveness.

And she took it unto herself.

When she didn't need him to take her pain anymore, they made love in the bed, on top of the covers. They removed all their clothes and touched every part of each other. She gasped at his intrusion and he moaned at her snugness. He moved within her slowly, watching her eyes the entire time, knowing she knew exactly where she was and why. And when she came, she didn't try to hold it inside her or force it from her. She rode it out, crying his name, and didn't look hatefully at him afterwards. She curled around him and thanked him.

It had been too long for him to just accept her thanks, he didn't need it, didn't want it. But he took it because she gave it to him, and he treasured everything she ever offered him.

It took a few more birthdays and summers before she told him she loved him. But he was glad it took that long because when she did, he knew it was real. He knew it hurt her to say it, knew that loving him actually caused her pain. But he knew she welcomed the pain because it meant she was real, alive, and strong.

She would endure the pain because he had endured hers first.

After that, it was only a matter of time before it didn't hurt her at all, when it made her feel good, happy, and whole.

Together they had lost their minds, found each other, and healed themselves.

And Snape thanked Merlin every single, excruciating, blissful day that he had not turned her away when she had showed up at his doorstep, empty and broken.

And she thanked Merlin that he had been strong enough to endure her pain, strong enough to fix her.

They carried the pieces of each other within them for the rest of their days together.

Fin.