

Over

by ConstantComment

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Companion piece to "Gentle Hands," but can stand alone, just as well.

One-shot

Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: This can be a companion piece to my other one-shot, "Gentle Hands", but does well enough on its own. HBP compliant, slightly AU.

Disclaimer: Whoever thought of the anti-litigation charm is rather brilliant, I must say.

Over

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It was over. Over. Over. Overoverover.

The word spun rapidly in her head like a Time-Turner, blending into incoherence as she cried with silent joy, among other emotions. She walked hand in hand with a nearly mute Harry Potter, weaving in and out of rubble and ash and the fallen as if it were an everyday occurrence that Hogwarts, 'Home' for seven years, was in pieces. Hermione looked up as a headless statue found its way into a niche and collapsed, the magic finally wearing off. Harry glanced over at her and smiled, his eyes still puffy and red, his hand gripping hers tightly as they found their way to the Great Hall.

"Go, Harry," Hermione whispered as she gently pried his fingers away. "I have to find someone."

"Mione! Please..." She hugged him tightly before he could say another word and directed him to a teary Ginny, who had emerged from the crowd of weary survivors. Hermione immediately took the young man's hands. She knew that Harry felt like a child and that he hated it, but he had every right to feel vulnerable, really. Defeating ultimate evil came at a cost. Within the week, Ronald Weasley would be buried in a mass ceremony for fallen war heroes, along with several other Order members and students. And Harry had since lost his purpose. All of his wizarding life had been dedicated to fighting this war, and now...

Now, there was nothing left but rubble in Voldemort's stead.

Hermione peered around in the Great Hall, searching among the crying, the laughing, the injured...the dying. Tears came to her eyes yet again, hoping against hope that

he had not fallen. That he was not lying in some dark hallway, eyes clouded and blank, quite unlike those dark pools she held so dearly. Hermione shivered as yet another wave of emotions threatened a nasty bout of nausea.

She had to find him.

"Madam Pomfrey?" Hermione's mouse of a voice startled the nurse from her records.

"Yes, dear? Oh...Miss Granger, you have quite a gash on your leg! Here, let me..."

"I'm fine, I'm just fine." She waved off the older witch's advances and asked, a hint of desperation in her voice, "Madam Pomfrey, have... have you seen Professor Snape?"

The woman blinked slowly and her tone became strained. "No. I don't recall seeing him anywhere on the grounds after You-Know-Who fell. I'm sure the man ran off with his Death Eater friends." The woman had trusted him greatly, at one point.

"Of course," Hermione choked out and turned, blank-faced, to the exit. She wasn't sure where she was going, but her legs were taking her somewhere. The image of his dead body bloodied, still and mangled on the ground flashed in her mind's eye and she fought yet another crashing fit of nausea that would surely kill her. She didn't think she could cry any more, even as every worst case scenario solidified in her mind's eye, morphing into hideous scenes as she floated through the deserted halls. The tears did not come, and instead her eyes burned, and a knot formed in her chest, and she was running. Running in a direction that she did not know. But running nonetheless.

~*~

It was over.

He stood in the middle of his private chambers, staring blankly at the grungy, sickly green walls, the blood still on his hands.

Mother of God, it was over.

Shaking the stringy hair out of his face and wiping the sweat from his brow, he turned and surveyed the premises again; the only sound now was his ragged breathing and the soft swish of his gabardine trousers as he pivoted around.

It was over. And he was finally alone. There would be no more life under the thumb of two masters who demanded so much. No more lies; no more torture; no more vows or promises to fulfil. He was finally left alone to his own devices.

Severus sank to his knees, defeated and broken. No purpose now for the double agent...the one who sought vengeance and perhaps some redemption. Now that the Dark Lord lay in ashes and the Boy-Who-Breathed was safe and sound, there was nothing left for him. He was alone without the constant occupation of feeding fallacies to the dark and baby-sitting the light.

He was alone.

His thoughts flitted to those who had died, and he crumpled again, nearly sobbing in grief, relief, and utter exhaustion. He clenched his fists in his hair and inhaled, hating the scent of dirt and grime from the battle. Hating the weariness from years of deception. He was surprised he was still alive...that he had kept himself alive for the past couple of months.

It must have been Hermione.

She, who walked with remarkable grace, reassurance and overbearing intelligence in her steps, had cared for him once at Grimmauld Place. It had been one of the most trying points in his career as informant to the Light, and she had no idea how much she had helped. She, with her soft words and gentle hands that had given him respite, had given him a reason to live. If only just a little while longer. There was no exchange of wise words, no poetic tripe to spout forth, but just... an exchange of comfort. And she had looked into his eyes with such an overwhelming amount of trust and worry that it left Severus Snape feeling a heady sense of hope.

She had cared.

He didn't even know why he thought about the insufferable chit at a time like this! He snorted, disgusted with himself. She was probably dead somewhere, anyway.

His shoulders sagged, and he wept, not bothering to catch the fat, salty tears on his torn sleeves.

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Hermione found herself staring at a large oak door down a dank corridor in the bowels of the castle. She was a bloody fool for being here. He probably wasn't there, anyway. Another disturbing image churned her weary stomach, and she forced it away. It certainly would not do to dwell on something that could not be changed.

Oh, who was she kidding?

And why did it matter whether or not he was dead? He wouldn't care to see her now. Not ever. It was a silly notion to consider that the Potions master would allow her into his home and invite her to a cup of tea...no, perhaps brandy. It seemed more appropriate, given the circumstances.

Nevertheless, the young woman with the mussed brown curls and tear-stained cheeks lifted a clenched fist to rap on the door. She did not continue, though, feeling foolish and lost in her own emotional state. Turning away, Hermione exhaled and made her way back down the hallway, only to pivot swiftly after a moment of indecision.

She knocked softly at the door three times, hoping against hope that her morbid imaginings had no factual grounds. There came no answer, and after a few moments where only the blood pumping through her temples could be heard, she broke down, wishing she had been in his place.

After a bout of silent, raging tears, Hermione inhaled a shuddering gulp of air and leaned forward against the large door, fanning her fingers against the warped wood.

It opened silently.

Startled, Hermione steeled herself and pushed it open wider, only to find the person she was crying over kneeling on the cold stone floor with his back to her, staring unseeingly at the filthy green walls and years-worn furniture. Her heart skipped a beat and she found that she could not move. He was alive.

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"I thought you were dead." A small voice came from the open doorway and Severus blinked. She...in his frazzled mental state...was dead. He heard her soft footsteps, noticing a slight limp as she approached him from behind. He could not move. She? Of all people to come looking for him, she had? Of course she had. It made perfect sense...the little Gryffindor...she was always worried for others, and never for herself.

"I assure you, I'm well on my way to Hell, already." He smirked, finally turning his head in her direction. He could hear her exhale and then could feel the tangible silence as the tears gathered in her eyes. "Why on earth are you crying?" he asked almost disbelievingly, although his quiet words did not have the desired effect.

"I thought you were dead!" she sobbed, covering her face with those once gentle hands that now shook terribly. He stood slowly and with a tremendous effort, as his limbs had seemed to stop working with the shock and enormity of the events.

"Miss Granger, why are you down here?"

"I...I..." She took her hands away from her face, revealing a look of incredulity. "You're bloody*alive*!" She threw her fists at his chest to his surprise and did not stop until she was exhausted. He grabbed her forearms and steadied her, waiting for a legitimate excuse. She shook out of his grip with a frustrated grunt, only for tears to well up in her eyes again. "Bloody inconsiderate fool! I should have *known* to look here first of *course* it would be like you to bloody shut yourself up in your own personal hell after all you've done..."

"Miss Granger."

"...you are *such* an idiot sometimes can't you figure out that some people do care about you? You can't just go off and hide somewhere in a dark corner because you know what will happen? People will think you are DEAD! And they already have enough on their plates besides worrying whether or not you've survived! Maybe I shouldn't have looked for you! Maybe I shouldn't have searched all over this bleeding *ruin* of a castle to find you! Because obviously you don't care enough about yourself and you certainly don't care enough about me. AND you have the ridiculous notion to call me..."

He grabbed her, cupping her battle-worn, beautiful face, and crushed his lips to hers. "Hermione..." he murmured against her lips, his eyes still closed, his mind bent on savouring the moment.

"... After all we've been through..." she finished, her eyes widening with shock. Then, just as suddenly as realization dawned, she clutched his bloodied collar and found his lips again.

A/N: *Reviews are greatly appreciated!!!*