

Lost Cause

by irishredlass

Sometimes love is not enough.

One Shot

Chapter 1 of 1

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Who knew wizarding funerals could take so long? Hermione thought to herself as she drew the edges of her scarf up to block out the biting wind. Or was it that this one took so long to actually happen?

The day was a perfect match to her mood and complimented the countenance of the deceased perfectly. The sky was a dark, dismal gray with rain, or rather ice, threatening on the horizon, and the wind cut through one's skin like a knife through valerian petal. Thinking of the soft, translucent petals brought Hermione back to where it all began.

During her seventh year at Hogwarts, she had finally been able to enjoy a normal year of schooling. Voldemort had been defeated with surprisingly few losses to the side of the Light...the worst of those considered to be Headmaster Dumbledore. Now twenty years later, Hermione still held a different opinion of the (often thought benevolent) manipulative General behind the Order of Phoenix. She thought it rather fitting the man's birthday was in late May; he was the epitome of two-faced.

Professor Snape had survived the attack from Voldemort's familiar, Nagini, by creating immunity to the toxic venom within his bloodstream, coupled with what ended up being abuse of both a highly powered Calming Draught and Pepper-Up Potion. It still amazed Hermione that none of his colleagues had noticed, or maybe it was they hadn't cared to notice. Regardless, the damage had been done.

Truthfully, Hermione herself had not noticed back then, and she had worked closely with the dour man completing her NEWTs honors project in potions. The only difference apparent back then was he had become more amenable and was actually willing to teach rather than spending each class period trying to set a new record in point deduction. Oh, he had still deducted points, but after the war they were truly justified and equally distributed amongst all four houses. Over the course of her study, she had managed to build a rather strong rapport with the taciturn man and had come to rely on his counsel and advice.

A chance meeting more than five years after she had left the hallowed halls of Hogwarts Castle had changed all that.

Severus Snape had been the last man she expected to run into in the back alleys of wizarding Ireland. Working as a liaison between wizarding and Muggle societies, Hermione had travelled through Europe, educating Muggle families when the time was appropriate for their children to enter school, but she had never missed a chance to hit the local used bookshops when she was travelling. That is how she had literally run into her old professor as she walked the street, her nose lost in a book. He had been exiting the local Apothecary.

"P... Professor..." Hermione had stammered when she'd recognized the haggard visage of her former professor. The years had apparently not been kind to him. In fact, he'd appeared more drawn than he had in the last days of the final battle.

But then she had not been not one to talk. A failed romance with Ron, too much indulgence in comfort foods, and over-dedication to her work had drastically changed

Hermione's appearance as well. She had gained at least a stone, had blemishes on her face, and only really put an effort into her appearance when she was to meet new students and their parents.

"Miss Granger," he had curtly replied as he'd rushed off in the other direction before she could engage him in conversation.

For weeks after the chance meeting in Ireland, Hermione had found herself wondering about Professor Snape. She had known little of what had happened to him since she had left Hogwarts. Last she had heard, he had suddenly left the school a year ago after the disastrous break up between himself and Headmistress McGonagall. His departure from the school had been as much of a surprise as finding out that her two former professors had been married. In the last year, there had been no word of what he was doing to support himself, and as far as she knew, no one had seen him in the wizarding world.

Hermione was brought back to herself as the icy rain began to fall. It seemed that everyone who was anyone in the world of Potions had come to pay their respects to the deceased. She wondered how many of these people knew the man she had come to know.

Three months after that chance meeting in Ireland, Hermione had once again run into Severus Snape. This time outside of the Apothecary in Diagon Alley, and this time he had literally collapsed at her feet. Not really thinking what she was doing, she had gathered him in her arms as best she could and Disapparated with him back to her London flat, and thus had begun the rollercoaster life she lived for the next ten years.

Hermione had been shocked to discover just how skeletal he had become. Severus Snape had never been what one would call a robust man, but now he was so thin you could feel every rib on his body...even through his tattered robes. His color had been more gray-green than the sallow one, associated with his Greek/Irish heritage that cried out for sunlight to enhance his coloring. Even unconscious, his body had been racked with faint tremors, and his face coated with an unhealthy sheen of perspiration.

After she had made him as comfortable as she could in her spare bedroom-slash-study, she had set about preparing some lunch for the both of them. It had been obvious that he needed nourishment. Falling back on her Muggle heritage, she had settled on the comfort food of chicken soup. It would be easy to digest and would settle easy on one's stomach. She had just set the pot to simmering when she was startled by a shriek, soon followed by the crash of the bedside oil lamp in the spare room.

Running to the doorway with wand at the ready, she had been startled to find the ill man on the floor in the throes of what appeared to be a seizure. Rushing to the medicine cabinet, she had grabbed Calming Draught to calm his nervous system and returned to his side. His skin had been speckled with blood where he had cut himself on the shattered glass, and he had been unconscious. Quickly, she had cast a spell to dispatch the debris; kneeling by his head, she had brushed the hair from his face, wondering what could be wrong with him. As her fingers had grazed his cheek, he was startled awake, grabbing her wrist.

"Miss Granger, to what do I owe the honor of your presence?" he had rasped.

Hermione had mourned the loss of his velvety tones.

"Professor, you are ill... you collapsed in Diagon Alley... I didn't know what else to do so I brought you to my flat.... please let me help you back to the bed." Hermione had rambled in her nervousness.

"I don't need your help or anyone else's," he had gasped as he'd struggled to gain his feet.

By some miracle, he had made it to the edge of the bed, that effort alone having winded him.

Her soft heart had known better. The professor needed help, and badly, but she had known she could not force her aid on him. He'd been as skittish as a newborn unicorn.

"Perhaps not, but perhaps I could convince you to stay to lunch?" she had offered. "I've a pot of chicken soup on the stove and some fresh rolls from the bakery."

He had grunted his assent, and Hermione had directed him to the lavatory. Leaving the Calming Draught on the bedside table, she had left him to freshen up while she saw to their meal.

Ten minutes later, a changed Severus Snape had entered her kitchen. Though his color was still off, he had seemed steadier on his feet and more settled, Hermione had thought, for lack of a better word.

The two had spent an enjoyable evening finding much to converse on. Though it had troubled her thoughts, Hermione had not brought up again the state she had found him in earlier that day. Severus had left well into the night after having issued an invitation to Hermione to return her hospitality.

Thus had begun the course of the next six months. Rarely had a day passed when the two of them did not see each other.

On occasion, Hermione had still thought he was not well, but whenever she had broached the subject, Severus would brush off her concern or become abrupt and tell her to mind her own business.

Finally, one evening after they had enjoyed perhaps a bit too much elf-made wine, Severus had confided in Hermione his addiction. The reason he had collapsed was because he had been trying, once again, to cleanse his system of the potions that had sustained him through the war and now held him captive.

Hermione, in her own mind, had likened this to her aunt who had been an alcoholic. Time and time again, Aunt Jane would get sober only to go back to drinking after some catastrophe or success that she seemed unable to cope with any other way. It did not matter, good or bad, Aunt Jane had always ended up back where she had started, hitting the brandy, sherry or what have you everyday... until the next time.

Confession had not been the only thing that brought their relationship to a new level that fateful night. With inhibitions lowered by wine and conversation, the two had found solace in each others arms.

Thank heaven the Minister was completing his eulogy. It looked as though this interminable experience would soon end.

Hermione watched from the sidelines as Margot was consoled and comforted. She was the latest in a string of witches Severus had used and abused only to assuage his own feelings of inadequacy. Admittedly, she was better than her successor. Hermione had actually felt sorry for the young witch. She had had no idea what she was signing on for when she rushed head long into a relationship with the Potions master.

Severus had been a consummate spy who took lying to a new level. One could only assume he had believed the lies he told others or he would not have been so convincing. Then after he had you sucked in, the shields came down and you found the charming, debonair man was the real illusion. The sad part was that, to this day, Hermione still loved the wizard, and a part of her always would, though she knew him perhaps better than anyone else...but then that is what comes of living and lying for the one you love. It had not been all bad, but Severus had devastated her in ways that no other living human would ever manage. She had learned her lesson, and the professor had taught her well. She would never forget the day she had discovered just how superficial he could be...

"Hermione," he had said to her, "I have no qualms about sharing a physical relationship with you; however, you must understand that it can go no farther than that. I am not in love with you, and though I enjoy our time together, you are not physically attractive to me."

In saying so, Severus had effectively put the responsibility of their relationship or lack thereof, on Hermione's shoulders. A defense he had used many times throughout their relationship.

Granted, she was no Lavender Brown, but neither was she Millicent Bulstrode. It had made Hermione wonder just what had caused the split between Severus and Professor McGonagall

It had been shortly after this when Hermione had literally saved his life. She had come to fear entering his home because she had been afraid when she entered she would

find him dead. His addiction had become so out of control that he was going through vats and vats of the potions with little or no relief. Then, one night, she had tricked him in to going to St Mungo's when she answered a cry for help on the contingency that he'd seek medical assistance. His answer as always had been, "tomorrow." Tomorrow had finally arrived.

It had been touch and go for the first week, but finally he had started to get better. The Healers had said he would never be the same again. He could go home, but he would probably never brew again. In truth, when Hermione had brought him home, he could not even walk. She'd had to levitate him everywhere, and she could not leave him alone for more than an hour. The potions had damaged his internal organs beyond the Healers' skill, and it had been up to time and a higher power for him to heal any further. They had suggested she admit him to the Janus Thickey Ward and leave him there. Instead, she had quit her job and stayed home to care for him herself. She had given up her flat and moved into Spinner's End.

Her world had become Severus. She had lost all ties to her friends and the world outside of Spinner's End. Gradually, her dedication had paid off, and he had got better. The Healers had been amazed at his progress. After two years, he had finally become healthy enough and was able to return to brewing. Though they had kept to themselves, rumors had circulated in Britain, and there was not an Apothecary around that would touch him with a ten foot broom. He had made inquiries abroad and was offered a very promising position in Ireland.

Together, they had moved to the Emerald Isle. It had seemed all would work out until one night Severus had showed his true colors once again, though this time he had tried to make it sound as if it were generosity on his part; it was wrong for Hermione to tie herself to him, he had said. She was young and deserved to experience life, have a family, etc.

Almost overnight he had found himself another witch to cohabitate with. She had been older than Hermione, but more of what Severus had espoused as beautiful: tall, thin and blond. Within six months, less than a year after they had moved to Ireland, he had married again.

Hermione had been heartbroken, but she had stood by him because his friendship was dearer to her than life itself.

The marriage had not been what he had hoped. It seemed he had found a witch more like himself than Hermione had thought possible. She was selfish, self-centered and destructive. Severus had turned to the Calming Draught he had not touched since the day Hermione had taken him to St Mungo's.

Soon it had been as though the previous five years had never happened, except this time, he was married. Hermione had hated herself for her weakness, but she could not turn him away from her home, her heart, or her bed. It sickened her now to think of it. It went against every moral fiber of her being, but yes, she had had an affair with a married man.

During the ensuing years, she had lost count of the number of times she had come to his rescue. The times she had come rushing when he would Floo call her in the middle of the night, strung out on Calming Draughts and vowing he was through with Sabrina. Every time, she had promised herself it would be the last time, yet every time he called, she had gone. It was like he had become her addiction. Cognitively, she had known she was only setting herself up for more hurt and more pain, but her heart had been her worst enemy.

Those who had come to pay their respects were finally clearing away. Hermione had no intention of following the masses to Severus' house on the Isle. She doubted she would be able to play the part needed for such a scene.

Instead, she found herself walking up to the charcoal monument that marked Severus Snape's final resting place. She had more memories to exorcise, and now seemed as good a time as any. The wind and rain had died down, though the sky was still gray and overcast. She cast a Shielding Charm on the ground and knelt before his marker.

"Well, you buggered it up fine this time, didn't you, my friend?"

Yes, even after all they had been through, she still considered him a friend, and there was a part of her heart that would always love him and what could have been.

She finally let the tears flow as snippets of their lives flashed in her mind. Severus as her professor: he had been so proud, so tall and so strong; the night he had first confessed his addiction and his fears of the future, and when she had held him as he cried for his lost love. The worst had been the nights when he had pleaded for her to help him end his life.

Oh, there had been happier times too, especially in those five years when everything had seemed to be covered in fairy dust. They had laughed and loved, and Hermione had hoped for a future. She had desperately wanted the chance to give this brave, brilliant man the life he deserved, a life in which he would finally feel loved and cherished. She would have done anything for him.

Had it only been a year since she had finally come to the breaking point? One cycle of the seasons since he had moved in with yet another witch...as he had discarded Hermione, and her love for him, yet again. In twelve short months, she had finally said enough is enough and had taken control of her life back. She had stopped jumping when he owled, stopped running when he called, but she had never stopped caring. It often felt as though she were cutting her own heart out, but she knew she was a better witch for it.

And now she would have her say...

"Severus, I do not know if you can hear me. A part of me wants to believe you can and that you will grieve for what you lost," Hermione whispered as she wiped the tears from her face.

"I was the best thing that could ever have happened to you. I loved you with everything that was in me, but that wasn't enough. I don't pretend to understand why and will not accept excuses anymore. The lack was never in me. It was always you. I thought I would always love you, but now all I can feel is pity."

With those final words, Hermione rose from her knees, brushed out her robes and walked away, never looking back.

She never saw the translucent form of Severus Snape hovering just beyond the charcoal gray monument of his final resting place, nor the pain that marred his face at her last words. He knew she was right.