

Ten Lifetimes

by OzRatbag2

Hermione shares some precious memories.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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The prompts that I used in this story are at the end.

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~*~

I've lived a lifetime of anniversaries. So many memories, and so many changes in my life's direction, that it's hard to determine which is vying for greater prominence. It's a special day for both Severus and me, one we look forward to when it arrives every ten years.

You see, Severus and I are celebrating ten lifetimes. It's our own term, coined by Severus actually, to mark each decade we've known each other five for Severus and five for me. At each turning point in our lives, our relationship to each other has changed or deepened, and coincidentally that seems to almost operate on the premise that it takes us about nine years to stop playing silly buggers and one year to make whatever we both want happen. It's not a precise science, but then life never is, is it?

A lifetime ago, I was simply Hermione 'the bookworm' Granger, an unbearable swot who couldn't help but regurgitate facts, odd snippets of trivia, and nonsensical statements that made sense at the time but make me cringe now. It's really a wonder I made any friends at all. Severus tells me that constantly. It's his way of showing me through his lifetimes of memories that I could have been like him in far more ways than I am already.

Hopefully, without the five-o'clock shadow at the end of a long day, or the snotty mood when a shipment of manuscripts fails to arrive on time.

But I'm getting ahead of myself again. Another one of my failings I'm afraid, but as this is me trying to make sense of which anniversary we should be celebrating, or perhaps more correctly, in which particular order, you'll just have to bear with me while I get around to the crux of this rambling series of thoughts. Severus, who has an opinion on just about everything, is remarkably silent when it comes to the issue of what we should be celebrating. Give the man a roast, a sinfully rich pudding and a good shag, and he'll agree to almost anything.

So, where should I start? At the beginning seems the logical place to start, doesn't it, but what might be logical for me could well be nonsensical to you, the reader. Anyway, I'd best make a start with it, at any rate. You see, Severus gets a trifle miffed if I'm late for anything and being late for the anniversary of our fifty years together, our ten lifetimes, would be almost unforgivable. And, as Severus so rightly points out, Pensieves were made for a reason. Writing down thoughts seems a particularly Muggle exercise, according to him.

I offered to burn all his old scraps of recipes, potions experiments and the like, after transferring it all to a Pensieve of course. As filthy looks go, the one Severus bestowed

on me barely a week ago was truly one of his best. Mind you, he stopped any conversation about my writing about the same time, preferring, I think, to arch an eyebrow at me casually every so often. I always know when I've won an argument with Severus. He clams up and develops either a facial tic or a wandering eyebrow. Silence and no quirks is a true sign of intense anger or irritation. It's still unsettling all these years later.

You could say that Severus uses his mood swings like a sporting exercise. He derives a great deal of pleasure from the sport of it, and I develop a great deal of mental agility trying to untangle it all. Whatever it is, it seems to work and that's really all that matters in the end.

So, where was I?

Oh, yes, one of many lifetimes ago, I was a student, a girl who concentrated on that which was plainly in front of me instead of delving deeper into the whys and wherefores of the world that had been opened to my eyes. I often think back to those days, the terror of Voldemort and the growing up the three of us did in so many short years. I still see Harry and Ron, and we have the sort of enduring friendship that means that we can begin any conversation where we last left it. Severus finds it amusing, I think. It's something he can't quite understand, as though not having seen someone for months on end necessitates some sort of introductory posturing, instead of an instant warmth and regard. I am ever thankful that something as dangerous as a troll made the three of us see each other as more than potential antagonists.

It's all well recorded, our school years. Being best friends with Harry meant that more rather than less was written about each of us. Mind you, Severus hardly escaped the inevitable cross references in various almanacs, but he's inclined to dismiss it as gibberish vomited across a page.

Charming, isn't it? Mind you, he does grow on you, I have to say. You needn't look so sceptical. Severus has many traits that he'd murder me for putting down here, so you'll just have to take my word for it.

~*~

My next important turning point in my lifetimes came after Voldemort had been vanquished finally. It took long enough, and there were many times it seemed too hard a task to complete. The alternative, horrifying as it would have been, was incentive enough, really. Oh, there are theories galore about how Severus survived Nagini, and though his exoneration was grudgingly granted, he's never even told me exactly how he managed to survive Nagini's 'kiss.' He closes down at the merest suggestion that he might like to finally give up the secret, and the little black storm cloud above his brow is his uncontrolled manifestation of that irritation. I laughed the first time I saw it, but Severus and I were merely colleagues at that point rather than anything else. I nearly lost his friendship over it actually. No amount of grovelling on my part or heartfelt apologies appeared to burrow below his armour. He only confided in me last year that it was an overhead conversation between Arthur and me on my twenty-fifth birthday that completely derailed him. Severus told me that he was hurt to think I would laugh at him. As a man used to being regarded as a caricature, he felt it was a betrayal on my part, laughing at him at his most vulnerable, particularly when it seemed to him that I might like him as himself, without the baggage of the past weighing both of us down. I did, but it took the threat of his loss to really open my eyes to him.

You see, Arthur played a pivotal role in this phase of my life. The slightly bumbling, Muggle-loving eccentric gave way to the shrewd, calculating head of the Department of Mysteries. I know, I got the most enormous shock when I arrived bright-eyed and full of verve and enthusiasm for my first day at the Ministry, after a lazy few years doing very little about much of anything, including work or study. It still surprises me to think he had all of us hoodwinked for so long, not that I could tell anyone at the time. There were glimpses of the amiable father of one of my best friends every so often, but it wasn't until I'd been with the department for about five years that the Knut dropped and I realised that Arthur's trusted position in the Order of The Phoenix should have meant more at the time than it did.

Arthur played his role so well, as did Severus.

Arthur would always just look at me if I was being dim about something, with that penetrating expression that basically shouted that the battered timeworn cover of any book could often hide the most precious of treasures. Severus is like that too, to a certain extent. Unfortunately, the precious treasure usually expresses himself by blowing a raspberry and giving me the finger if I disagree with him, often accomplished without needing to look up from whatever book he's engrossed in at the time. That was his exact reaction when Arthur made both of us partners, actually. No explosion, no swearing, just a dismissive noise like a flatulent baby and a finger poking up near the spine of his book.

I was, of course, quite affronted and had many begging conversations with Arthur in an attempt to be re-assigned, but it fell on deaf ears. We worked well as a team, Severus and I, and Arthur recognised that, even if neither of us could for quite a while. Arthur was so much more than my employer. He was my friend and confidante, particularly when I felt aggrieved at whatever Severus had done to piss me off at any given moment, and there were lots of those moments. My blubbing anguish at Severus' distance and visible loathing when I had laughed at him was one of those life-turning events.

It was one of those pivotal moments when so many 'ifs' met to become a new series of possibilities.

Severus told me last year that he didn't mean to eavesdrop on our conversation, but he had been on his way to Arthur's office to tender his resignation, citing irreconcilable differences, and overheard my anguish that I had damaged something that could have been so much more without my stupidity. Severus also tells me often that it was at that moment that he knew that I felt that special connection that he too had been trying to ignore.

Though I didn't know what had changed once I'd dried my eyes and listened to Arthur's patient explanation that no man likes to be ridiculed, particularly not someone like Severus, who underneath it all was as vulnerable as a Kneazle kitten in unfamiliar situations. Arthur opened my eyes to what he'd seen when he'd first assigned us as partners.

Severus and I have never been apart for more than a few days since. Arthur showed me. showed both of us. what was plainly obvious to just about everyone else around us.

~*~

I suppose I could record the nitty gritty details of our life together from that time, but that's an awfully dry and boring way to describe something so wonderfully mysterious and ever-changing. We, neither of us, are the people we were when we first discovered shared hopes and dreams of a future. Our friends were initially sceptical, citing all sorts of reasons why we might be better off as friends, and none could believe that though we were now living with each other, we suddenly weren't merely friends but had morphed into something completely different. It still amuses me greatly to think of how silly that attitude was, because it was as if Severus and I suddenly lost interest in each other unless we were shagging. Our relationship grew and changed into something even more special because we changed how we viewed each other. The friendship remains, but it's deeper. a connection almost on a cellular level, as inane as that sounds. I told you it'd be too hard to explain, but I suppose the only real thing I can say is that we just 'are.'

Don't get me wrong, there are still many things that Severus does that he manages to irritate me with, and conversely, he isn't shy in letting me know if I do something that makes him want to grind his teeth into bleeding stumps. For all our similarities and likes, we both know that it's the interests we don't share that add yet more layers to our close and loving relationship.

Severus will devour writing of any kind, and I find it infinitely frustrating when we decide to go to the local chippy up the road. I'll usually have haddock and no amount of cajoling that cod isn't a good choice because of the research on depleted fish stocks will stop Severus from ordering it every single time. His standard argument, after the obligatory hard stare accompanied by the wandering eyebrow phenomenon, is to point out that one piece of cod once a month is hardly cause enough to brand him an environmental terrorist. He also usually pinches the local rag, crumpled and torn by customers waiting for their orders, and takes it with him as we sit down to eat, where he engrosses himself in the latest gossip, blindly fishing around for a piece of cod on a greasy piece of paper. If I'm lucky, I'll get the occasional grunt to any question I might be silly enough to ask. It's annoying to say the least.

Severus will, of course, tell you that having me open the latest manuscripts to cross his desk, all the while leaving little notes telling him which ones look like they'd be interesting. not profitable, just interestingly intriguing. irritates him no end. His standard response is to tell me that intriguingly interesting doesn't usually sell as well as bog standard. It's an oft repeated conversation, that one, but as we both jointly own *Saail Deich*, one of only a handful of Wizarding publishing houses, it's something he just has to deal with. usually by ensuring the mail is delivered directly to him and coincidentally finding a pressing reason for me to go into Muggle London.

He knows I know what he's doing every single time, just as Severus is uncomfortably aware that anything that truly catches my eye ends up copied and read, then slipped onto his desk when he's out. Many authors who wouldn't have made it past a quick Incendio and caustic rejection letter usually with corrections have been published by us in the last five years.

Severus told me, the first time I did it, that I had developed a sneaky streak whilst he was concentrating on something else. I told him that living in close quarters with a Slytherin was bound to corrupt me eventually.

So, you see, we both bicker and grumble like an old married couple, with the notable exception that we've never actually formalised our relationship. We both decided early on that we didn't need a piece of paper to signify something we already knew intimately, though Severus did suggest about ten years ago that it was about time he made an 'honest woman' of me. I pointed out that I was already an honest woman, but that I'd happily go through any service of his choice if he wanted to be an honest man. Strangely enough, he dropped the topic very quickly, though I'm still intrigued as to who put such a silly idea into his head in the first place. As for children, it was simply a mutual decision that if it happened, then we would love any children that came into our lives. Now, though, Severus eschews any form of tact and uses his formidable vocabulary to verbally eviscerate any of our friends or acquaintances who choose to offer helpful suggestions about our relationship. Mind you, tact was never particularly high on his list of social skills, but Severus has mellowed to a degree over time. I'm not so silly as to point that out, mind you. There is an element of self-preservation necessary at times.

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So, there you have it, our ten lifetimes in a nutshell for want of a better expression. I could have included other turning points and other life changes, but I'm running out of time before our celebration and after all, I have to save those for our next lifetime celebration. The journey is by no means over, and Severus and I still have many lifetimes to live, places to discover and things to do. We both enjoy the challenge of finding new projects to explore, and who knows where we might be when the next decade comes upon us. I will, of course, record it and place it with this ramble along with the other thoughts I've recorded over the last many years.

~*~

So, why write it all down in the first place?

Because for me, remembering is half the fun of loving, sharing and caring for another person. Severus' choice, unfortunately, for such sentimentality is to blow a raspberry and give me the finger.

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(1). Post-Hogwarts careers, something other than teaching

(2). The Most Precious Present of All

(3). Severus and Hermione are celebrating their tenth anniversary... but they're not married and never have been. So what exactly are they celebrating?