

Starting Anew

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After the war, Hermione Granger and Severus Snape must find their place in the new world free of the Dark Lord.

Seconds

Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: Harry Potter and all related characters are the property of JK Rowling. I am just playing with them for a while! I am not profiting from this in any way.

A/N: This is canon compliant up to the DH Epilogue, since I thought it was a ton of rubbish.

This is the first of ten shorts written for the LiveJournal community 10iloveyou, for the 'time' prompt table. It is my first foray into fanfiction so I'm a bit nervous. Please tell me what you think!

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1. Seconds

Upon meeting Hermione Granger at age eleven, it had taken Severus mere seconds to develop a dislike for the girl.

However, upon meeting Hermione Granger once again at age twenty-five, it had taken mere seconds to develop a respect for the girl no woman.

To this day he wasn't exactly quite sure what had happened, and he was perfectly fine being left in the dark, thank you very much. What he was sure of was that he saw Ronald Weasley leaving his pub of choice that night covered in beer, followed closely by a very angry blonde, who was also covered in beer, and leaving behind a fuming Hermione Granger, the cause of this tragic waste of fine brew. What he was even surer of was the pleasure he felt from watching the situation, a pleasure he felt deep down in the bottom of his heart, the pleasure of watching Weasley get what he deserved for throwing away one of the better things that had ever happened to him. Not that Severus particularly liked Hermione Granger, no, but it didn't take liking someone to respect them.

It certainly didn't take liking someone to laugh at their expense, either, particularly in the case of Ronald Weasley. Before he could catch himself, Severus was laughing harder than he had in recent years, so much so that he thought his lungs were going to collapse, causing him to die of laughter right there on the dirty pub floor. As a result, he ended up on the receiving end of Hermione's excellent aim.

Being doused in beer did nothing to quell his laughter, however if anything, it only intensified it. Of all of the things that could have happened that night, being covered in brew by a former student wasn't one of the things he had anticipated. He took a moment to compose himself, wiping the beer from his face with his handkerchief, and grinning at the hellion that still held the mug in her hand. "Why, Miss Granger, it is a shame you never played Quidditch. The Gryffindor team could have used such an asset as your fantastic aim."

One thing led to another, drinks were had, and somehow he had ended up with the bushy-haired know-it-all living in his home as his assistant.

Life after the war hadn't treated Severus particularly well. After some twist of fate, he had managed to survive Nagini's bite, something he hadn't necessarily planned on doing. He did, however, have a rather fantastic contingency plan, just in case his lunatic master did decide to set the beast on him before Potter had discovered and destroyed the Horcruxes, and it was in the form of a shrunken first aid kit which he always kept in the breast pocket of his robes. Severus knew he had to protect the boy until the final deed was done. He couldn't do that if he was dead.

To be quite honest, he hadn't expected the kit's contents to do much of anything against the snake's powerful venom or the gaping hole that the bite left in his neck. He wasn't even sure why he had even tried to heal himself if the situation was so bloody hopeless, but it felt *right*. The need to actually survive outweighed the possibility of letting the darkness overtake him, so he used every last bottle in the kit, even if the potion didn't quite fit the situation. It had bought him enough time for someone from the Order to come find him, likely directed there by Potter and his merry band of do-gooders, though he knew in his heart that they had expected to retrieve a dead body rather than one barely clinging to life.

He had expected to be sent directly to Azkaban, where he would be thrown into a cell until they could figure out exactly what to do with him. That was the way of the wizarding world after all – hex first and ask questions later, especially when dealing with a known Death Eater. He was sure that all of those years of spying for the Order were small acts compared with his supposed cold-blooded murder of Albus Dumbledore.

What Severus hadn't expected was for Potter to not only look at his memories, but also distribute them to every politician and news outlet that he could convince to hear him out. Within the week he was exonerated of all charges and even given the status of Hero of the Light, though he was not privy to this information until well after the shit storm had finally calmed down. It wasn't from a lack of trying; being in a coma for three months while one's body heals does tend to put you out of the loop.

Thanks to the wonders of the wizarding world, he was right as rain within months of waking up, with very few physical repercussions. Sure, he still had a few muscle spasms here and there from the repeated use of the Cruciatus Curse, but it wasn't anything a few potions and special creams couldn't take care of. There was also the occasional numbness from being hit with the neurotoxin and the unsightly scar that was left behind on his neck, but damn it all, he was alive! He was alive with no master to serve but Potions master Severus Snape, and he planned to live out what life he had left to the fullest.

Alive and well, Severus Snape was given a nice purse from the Ministry for his services during times of war, a gold medal (which had a happy home hooked on the back of his bathroom door), a hearty pat on the back from the Minister of Magic, and most importantly, his freedom.

And boy did that taste ever so sweet.

The first thing he did once given his freedom was return to Hogwarts to patch things up with Minerva. They had acted rather cattily at times, much like two children bickering over who had the better house (he did, he had always assured her), but he did like her. He genuinely *liked* her.

Severus missed the camaraderie during his stint as Headmaster, when he was truly supposed to be playing the righteous bastard. The entire wizarding world thought he was nothing but a traitor and murderer, Minerva included. That night on the Astronomy Tower had effectively ended any sort of friendship that they had once had. It had pained him to know that the only person who truly accepted him for who he was hated him for something that was out of his hands. Throughout his tenure as Headmaster he had desperately wished to seek her guidance, to sit down with her at the end of a long day and have a few glasses of brandy while they talked about anything and everything. He had tried to reach out to her multiple times. However, he had already burned the bridge that once stood between them.

Severus supposed it was going to take some very un-Snape-like begging and pleading to even open the doors to friendship once more. Much to his surprise, he was instead greeted with more tears and apologies than he knew what to do with. He sneered and allowed the woman to cling to him like a lost child, gradually giving in to the embrace and clutching her just as tightly and shedding a tear or two of his own. After they dried their tears it was back to the way it was before the war had really reached a head, which included bickering about who was going to win the House Cup. For the first time in two years, life felt *normal*, like it had before the Dark Mark had slowly went from the muted green of an old tattoo to the rich blackness that signaled the second coming of the Dark Lord.

Over many pitchers of Gillywater, Severus and Minerva talked the night away, filling each other in on the blank spots they had missed during their falling out and reminiscing about old times.

As expected, Minerva offered him a job, either teaching Potions or his old Defense Against Dark Arts post, but he promptly turned down both.

Severus Snape was truly free for the first time in his life, and he was going places! He had no time to teach more dunderheads who had no passion for the art of Potions, nor the patience to attempt to teach children to use the more complex magic of defense when they didn't want to learn. He was nearly forty years old; it was time to live for himself and no one else.

When she asked what he would be doing, he shrugged and told her he didn't rightly know. Returning to Manchester was his next stop. After that he wasn't sure what he wanted – all he knew was that he wanted to live a normal life. The look on her face when he mentioned even possibly finding a woman and starting a family was one that he would remember until his final days. He carefully reminded her that he disliked *dunderheads*, not children in general, and that his children would surely be the complete opposite of a dunderhead and a pleasure to teach.

She, being the betting sort of woman, cocked her head to the side and informed him she would believe it when she saw it.

He, being the betting sort of man, grinned at her and said, "You're on."

Severus' second stop was his old home in Spinner's End. If he was going to be living there, many repairs had to be done. It was a filthy hole in the wall, just as it had been when he was a child, and something had to be done about the terrible 1950s décor and leaky fixtures in the bathroom. Before, it had been a practical act to leave it as it was. The messier the home, the fewer the visitors, and fewer visitors made for a much happier Snape.

Magic wasn't the answer to such a filthy domicile, so he went about things the good old-fashioned Muggle way and scrubbed by hand. He needed the cleansing just as much as his home did. Methodically he scrubbed away the years of pain and sorrow he had suffered within those four walls, ripping down the peeling, decrepit wall paper and replacing it with a fresh coat of clean white paint. He also put down new countertops in the kitchen, which allowed him to use the room as a makeshift prep lab, and ripped up the tattered and bloodstained carpeting in favor of fragrant wood flooring that looked like something that belonged in Malfoy Manor rather than a rundown row house in Manchester. All of the furniture was quickly replaced, except for the rocking chair, of which he had fond memories. The once barren basement was refurbished to make room for a small personal lab.

He spent hours in the back garden preparing a plot to grow herbs for brewing and cooking. Even the old Muggle appliances were replaced with newer state-of-the-art models that he was sure his mother would have killed for had she still been around. Even more, he purchased a computer for his office during one of his more spontaneous, devil-may-care shopping adventures, and quickly connected it to the Internet. Wizard he was, but not so ignorant to the many Muggle advancements that had come about since his youth.

Within three weeks his house was the way that *he* wanted it to be, a fresh and clean place for a fresh and clean start.

The next task was creating a means to survive. The stipend given to him by the Ministry was enough that he never had to work another day in his life, but that was not the Snape way. He was the son of a mill worker and had learned the meaning of hard work. It was the only quality that his father had instilled in him that he was proud of.

So, on the first of September, he marched to the Ministry in his best dress robes and applied for a business license for Snape's Secret Stash, a mail order service for high quality potions and rare ingredients at competitive prices.

The name and slogan needed work, he would admit as much, but within the first month of the launch, he found himself to be so swamped with orders from those who knew of his reputation as one of the finest Potions masters in Britain that he needed to find himself an assistant. Cheesy name or not, people wanted his work. Finally, after years of fighting for acceptance, he was getting the notoriety he deserved!

A seedy Muggle pub in Manchester was the last place he had anticipated finding an assistant, no less in the form of a bushy-haired Gryffindor for whom he had held contempt while she attended Hogwarts.

The unlikely pair had foraged a tentative friendship that bumpy night in November, which led to Hermione accepting the job as his personal assistant and moving into the spare bedroom in his home.

It had been a tough transition for Severus. Through his childhood years he had only shared his home with his mother and father. During the war he had the opportunity to house Wormtail, even though he suspected that it was more of a matter of the Dark Lord wishing to have him under constant surveillance rather than giving him a servant and assistant. Given that his only other experiences were familial and forced, willingly living with a twenty-something female for the first time was a bit unsettling.

Each day was the same at Snape's Secret Stash. Both Severus and Hermione were early risers, and in the lab by six in the morning. They would brew for a few hours and then break for breakfast, normally cooked by Hermione. She would then return to the lab and prepare for the next step while he stepped out into the garden for a quick smoke (nasty habit, he knew). The pattern would repeat at lunch, again cooked by Hermione while he readied shipments for the owl post. After lunch, they brewed if an order called for it, or spent the cool afternoons in the garden gathering herbs to be stored in the small storage shed that rested against the garden's back fence. After a hearty dinner, generally cooked by the first out of the lab, evenings were spent pleasantly in the sitting room either watching that infernal television that Hermione had insisted was necessary or discussing theories and advancements in the field of Potions. He had never enjoyed the company of another person more, not even Lily's company, something that had, at first, slowly killed him to admit. Each day he was more and more thankful that he had conned Hermione into working for him. He really didn't know how he would be handling life had she not come along and doused him with expensive beer. One thing he did know was he wouldn't be near as content.

One night, much to Severus' irritation, their predictable routine changed. Hermione had informed him that morning that she was going on a date, her first in the year she had been working for him, and the first since that fateful night when she had doused Weasley, Weasley's trollop, and himself in dark stout.

Feeling more like a dutiful father or even a worried lover than an employer, he waited up for her in the sitting room. At first, he distracted himself by watching old black-and-white movies from his childhood on television. When that got to be too nerve-wracking, he moved to the bookshelf and selected a novel that he was sure would keep his rapt attention. Of course that didn't work when he started to find startling similarities between the main heroine and Hermione. Did he even own any novels with a lead female character that wasn't as strong as his little lioness? Novels were thrown to the wayside in exchange for technical manuals for the 'blue ray player,' whatever that contraption was, which was also eventually thrown aside for a book about Manchester's local urban legends. Book after book, nothing kept his attention.

He eventually gave up and settled on watching the clock. He watched the clock tick nine, then ten, shortly followed by eleven and twelve. If he had to wait all night, he would, just so he could make sure she arrived home safely. If something happened to her, who was going to assist him in the lab? He knew he would never find someone who read him as well as she did.

The clock had just struck one when he heard her keys jingle in the lock of the front door. His already forgotten book lay even more forgotten in his lap when he saw the look on her face as she entered their home. Freshly tearstained and blotchy red cheeks were not a good look for Miss Granger.

He set his book aside and went over to his upset assistant.

"Are you alright?" he asked as he removed her scarf and unbuttoned the clasps on her coat.

"Do I look alright to you?" she snapped. "I have just had one of the worst dates of my life! I am a blotchy and soggy mess, and you ask if I am alright?"

"Come now, it couldn't have been that bad." Severus helped her out of her coat and hung it in the closet next to his own. "To the kitchen with you."

Obediently, Hermione allowed Severus to place his hand on her lower back and guide her to the kitchen. "Tea isn't going to help, you know," she said to him as she sat down. "I don't care how we think it is supposed to cure all; it doesn't."

"Would you rather that I offer you a lemon sherbet, or possibly a glass of Ogden's Finest?" He sneered at her.

"You don't have to be an ass about it," she shot back. "If I wanted to hear snide comments, I would have gone to see Harry or Ron." She paused and a look of contemplation took over her face. "Do we really have any Ogden's? A little something to calm the nerves wouldn't be out of place right now."

"We haven't had any since we polished off the last bottle on New Year's Eve." In an almost ritualistic way, he prepared the tea and a few sandwiches for good measure. From the look of things, she probably hadn't eaten much at all before the situation headed south. "You shouldn't drink when you are upset. You may end up doing something that you will regret in the morning." He, of all people, would know. He had walked that walk one time too many.

"The only thing I am going to regret in the morning is the fact that I went out with that berk. I am glad his true colors showed tonight rather than three or four dates down the road." She fell forward and her forehead hit the table with a 'thunk.' "How do I get tied up with these horrible men? When will I learn that if someone is setting me up with a 'fabulous' man, chances are they are horrible trolls who can't get dates on their own and have to rely on their friends?"

"What happened? I am not asking as your employer, but as your..." Severus paused. "Your friend." Yes, he supposed that is what he would consider her since they had never officially discussed titles other than what being professional potioners dictated. They bickered like an old married couple at times, and he had shared some of the deeper secrets of his soul with her, which she had returned in kind. One wouldn't do such a thing with anything other than a friend, or possibly a lover. Lover is something he certainly wouldn't have minded, given that she was an attractive witch and had felt good in his arms those few nights she had come to him in the middle of the night after having nightmares of the war. They weren't ready for that, though. He wasn't about to fuck up one of the better things that had ever happened to him just because she left him feeling randy after seeking him out for comfort.

Severus sat the tea and sandwiches on the table and proceeded to fix her a cup, two sugars and a touch of milk. When he placed the saucer in front of her, Hermione sat up in her chair. Almost like a greedy child, she grabbed the cup and took a rather large gulp of the tea. "Aren't you just the Nosey Parker this evening," she sneered at him, just like he had done to her many times when she had attended Hogwarts. It was a defense mechanism he recognized, one that he had hid behind time and time again.

Tired of this childish behavior, Severus stood from the table so quickly that the chair he sat in overturned and hit the ground, startling his young employee. "Look, I am concerned for your well-being. For the last year you have invaded every bit of my life, from my lab to my home, to my bed on occasion, and I am sorry if that has caused me to give a damn about you, Hermione! I cannot force you to talk, though I would be pleased if you'd enlighten me. If all you are going to do is grumble around like a spoiled child, I will go to bed and leave you to it. Just remember that we have a large order to start in the morning, and I want you up early and at your best. We can't afford to fuck it up." He gave her one of the looks he gave her when she was being impertinent in the lab, one that meant business.

"Fine, sit," she grumbled. "If you were anyone else, I would be leaving you high and dry."

"Good to know you hold me in such high esteem." He set his chair to rights and sat at the table once again, then fixed himself his own cup of tea. The seconds felt like hours as she played with her fingernails, picking off the varnish and collecting her thoughts. He entertained the idea of using Legilimency to see what had her so upset, but quickly banished it. It had taken the two of them long enough to break down the walls that they had built during the war, and he did not want to cause her inner mason to go wild because of his concern and aching at seeing her upset.

Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, she started to speak in a low whisper. "All he wanted was the fame that comes along with being a war hero, a pretty trophy on his arm and his face in the papers to get his name out there." She laughed in a tone that was far from the joyful laugh that he enjoyed hearing spill from her lips. "He fancied himself an author. He even brought me one of his manuscripts!" She reached into her bag and produced a folder, which she promptly slammed down onto the table. "A lovely little fluff piece about spending the war in hiding, about being so cowardly that he went to the continent and kept tabs on everyone through the so-called media coverage." She laughed again and waved her hand in a dismissing manner. "Because of that, he now wants to cash in on the 'fame and fortune' that he missed because he was too busy being a pansy."

She slowly stood and grabbed the manuscript. Severus watched her take it to the sink and throw it in, then incinerate it with a quick wave of her wand. She stood and watched it burn until only a pile of ash remained. Her dirty work accomplished, she returned to the table and sat in her chair. "Fame and fortune... We were just kids being used as pawns doing what we thought was our duty while he hides and later comes back to ride someone's coat tails!"

Severus pinched the bridge of his nose. He had his share of crazies, mostly after what money he was granted and his reputation as a 'dark hero' who only wanted a witch to take care of him so he could forget about his fallen love, Lily Potter. "What fame? We did what we had to do. We all did, on all sides."

"Exactly!" Hermione growled. "He made it sound like it was some glamorous thing. Sure! Spending months on the run was so abso-fucking-lutely amazing. I really did love spending time with those two smelly boys in a tent in the middle of the Forest of fucking Dean and never having enough to eat! We had such a fantastic time hunting for Horcruxes and avoiding capture. I wish I could be on the run from Death Eaters every day of my life! It was so refreshing and made me feel alive, certainly not scared for my life.

"Even more amazing was when we were captured and I was tortured by Bellatrix Le-fucking-strange! Cruciatuus tremors, post-traumatic stress disorder, and scars are just so sexy!" To further her point, she yanked aside the neckline of her robe to show him the scar that he knew started at her abdomen and crisscrossed over her torso, a constant reminder of what she had gone through in the Department of Mysteries during her fifth year. "I've got more mental and physical scars than any woman my age should ever have." The tears she had been fighting through her tirade finally began to fall. Severus reached across the table and cupped her cheek with his hand and wiped some of them away with his thumb. She leaned into his light caress, sighing when he withdrew.

He didn't like seeing her so upset. He needed to do something else very un-Snape-like to bring her out of her bad mood. If not for her sanity, for his own as well he had to live and work with the girl every day. If she was unhappy, it meant he was unhappy. He had already spent so many years unhappy, and he was not going to spend the rest of his life in anything less than a state of pure contentment.

"Are you saying that I'm not sexy because of my scars?" he asked her in low tone, attempting to pout at her.

She buried her face in her hands. "Merlin, not you too. I thought you were above that."

Severus stood from his chair and walked around the table to where she sat, turned her chair away from the table so he could kneel between her knees, pulling her into an embrace. "Come now. 'He was the wrong wizard for you,' 'there are plenty of fish in the sea,' 'one day your prince will come,' and all of that fairytale rubbish. When the time is right, something will click, and you will just know. It will come about when you stop looking." He grinned. "It will also teach you to stop taking your friends' advice on men."

Relief flooded him when she finally returned his embrace, wrapping her small arms around his chest and burying her nose in his neck so that her breath tickled his scar. He tightened his grip on her and took comfort in the scent of her chamomile shampoo.

"Why is this so complicated for me?" Her lips tickled his scar even more than her breath had. "Everyone else around me seems to find happiness. Harry and Ginny are married and expecting a child. Ron is having a fantastic career on the worst team in Quidditch history, yet he is happy. Neville and Hannah just married and have a booming floral shop. Where is my little chunk of bliss, my bit of happiness?"

"I'm starting to feel like Viktor did, having people flock to me only because of the status I've earned rather than taking the time and the effort to know who I really am. Sometimes I feel like a caged animal, or a circus side show freak. You remember my last trip to Diagon Alley. Not only was I faced with stares and a mini media frenzy, but that awful woman who made Bellatrix look like the picture of sanity!"

Severus nodded and shuddered. "Yes, I remember." That afternoon was one that he would have loved to forget, though the look on her face after she had arrived home that night was one that he would remember until the day that he died. A delusional woman who fancied him her husband had caught Hermione unawares while she was shopping for supplies and hit her with a nasty hex that had landed her in St. Mungo's for the afternoon and left her with two weeks of potions to take to quell any possible side effects. That scenario had truly made him want to lock Hermione away and keep her safe, but doing so would only make her feel even more like a caged animal. Keeping her safe and sound was his top priority, but making her feel even more estranged from society was not. However, he had still made a habit of going through her daily post since then, weeding out anything that was intended to harm her.

"Anyone who doesn't make the attempt to get to know the real you is a dunderheaded idiot. You are a bright and attractive witch who can hold her own, give any man a run for his galleons. You have stronger convictions and discipline than any of the girls you went to school with, and possess a much larger heart than I have ever known in my lifetime. You are worth getting to know, and much more." If anyone knew this, it was Severus, who had known her from age eleven on and watched her fight valiantly for what she believed in and for the people that she loved.

"I'm not so sure of that," she grumbled. "Either that, or the whole planet is filled with dunderheads." She tensed slightly. "That must be it, Severus. The planet is filled with dunderheads, present company excluded."

"I am sure of it, of all of those qualities, and that is that. Now mind your elders," he chastised in a teasing tone. Her hiccup-like giggle let him know that his attempt at humor had indeed made its intended impact.

"When did you become so wise?" she asked in a childlike whisper.

"When you weren't looking, love. Maybe next time you're not looking I will perform parlor tricks, and you will be disappointed that you missed them."

Slowly she pulled away from him. "Maybe it is time for me to invest in a Nanny-cam. I surely wouldn't want to miss those amazing parlor tricks."

He chuckled. "It's late, and we have an early morning ahead of us. Mr. Marshall's order isn't going to make itself, you know."

"You're right," she replied. "Goodnight, Parker."

"Goodnight, Hermione."

Severus watched her as she left the kitchen, and then went about putting away their tea service.

It had taken him seconds to dislike her as a child.

It had taken him seconds to respect her as a force to be reckoned with as a witch.

It had taken him seconds to realize that he really loved her as a woman.