

Keeping Up Appearances

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A year after the war, Hermione goes to finish her last year at Hogwarts. A series of threatening letters let her know the worst isn't over and someone will stop at nothing to kill her. Canon up to OotP. AU after. SS/HG, DM/HP.

Chapter 1

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DISCLAIMER: Not mine, no matter how much I wish it was.

"Hermione! What the hell is going on up there?!" yelled Hermione's mother, Diane.

"Just a minute!" Hermione yelled back. She stood up from where she was sitting Indian style on the floor and stretched. Walking to her bedroom door, she opened it and yelled down, "Sorry! I'm just cleaning; going through some things in my room."

"Don't yell from the stairs! Come down here and talk!" her mother yelled up at her. Hermione smirked at the contradiction in her mother's words and started down the stairs.

"Sorry, mum," Hermione started, rushing her words a bit. "I was trying to pack for school, but I realized that I had outgrown some of my robes. So I started going through my robes, which led me to go through my other clothes. After that, I had a pile of clothes and robes that I no longer wanted or fit in, lying on my floor. Since I wanted a space to pack thoroughly, I decided to put those clothes in bags so you can give the clothing bag to charity, and I can donate my old robes to the shop in Diagon Alley. THEN, I decided I was already going through old stuff anyway, so then I went through all my old books and notes and other school things from my trunk and started throwing them into their OWN trash pile. That all led me to start going through everything I have in my room and---"

"OK! I get it. Really. I do," interrupted her mom. "Is everything alright, honey? I know you've been upset these past few weeks." Her mother watched as Hermione refused to meet her mother's eyes. "Honey, I know it's hard, but don't let grief make you do anything rash, ok?"

Hermione met her mother's stare, her cinnamon eyes turned flat, and her tone matched as she said, "I don't know what you're talking about. I'm just trying to do a little cleaning. This has nothing to do with any GRIEF." She said the last word like it was a disease, something to be shameful of. "If I want to put aside old pictures, I will. I don't need to carry around my past with me everywhere I go." With that, Hermione turned and started back up the stairs, but before she had gone two steps, her mother's hand was turning her daughter back to her.

"Hermione Jean, listen to me. I know how it feels to lose a friend, lose someone you love. Your past is something that can't be, and shouldn't be, forgotten. I can understand you leaving pictures and other trinkets behind, but I'm just pleading that you don't get upset and destroy them, or throw them away. You'll regret it. I know I heard some things crash up there, and I know the difference between something landing in a junk pile, and something breaking. When you get back upstairs, why don't you use one of those spells and put it back together? That's what your magic is there for, right?" Her mother attempted a small smile, trying to get through to her daughter.

"The problem, mother," Hermione said coldly, "is that while breaking a picture frame or anything else might be able to be put together again using magic, there's no way I can *reparo* my past." With that, Hermione turned and stalked back up the stairs, and this time, her mother didn't try to stop her.

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Back in her room, Hermione slammed the door and took a look around. It was true, there were bags full of clothes and robes ready for donating, among other random items she had found while pilfering through her room. Last year, when she was walking around Diagon Alley amongst the "Trio", she had noticed many more shops. Usually when she went school shopping, it was with her parents and, being Muggles, they didn't want to be there too long. Like her, they didn't like being out of place or confused. Therefore, she had never gotten to really explore the Alley, and see its entire splendor, so to speak.

That's when she had seen Lady Lacy's Second Treasures and dragged the two boys with her. She fell in love with the second-hand shop right away. The stuff people gave away! Just the book section of the store was enough to keep her occupied, which turned out to be ok since the boys wandered off to the sports section to look at cheap second-hand Quidditch gear. She was ecstatic when the lady at the counter told her that with every bag of donations made, she would get 10% off her next order. By the time they were ready to leave, Hermione had four books that she felt she HAD to have, as well as some new clothes. She had started filling out more the last year, and now looked "like a girl" according to Harry. Harry had left with a Wales Eagles Quidditch jersey he had been excited to find in the male section, along with a black rubber band decorated with Snitches meant to attach to the backs of glasses to hold them in place while flying, and some aviator style sunglasses, obviously donated by a Muggle-born. They all laughed at Harry trying to look suave in them, and he claimed that they were the only sunglasses that would fit over his glasses, and the fact that he looked good in them was just an added bonus. Ron had---

Stop. Don't think about that, Hermione told herself. It's bad enough he haunts your dreams; don't let him in your day thoughts as well.

Hermione sighed. She knew it was no use. Every day she had to tell herself the same thing, but it was always in vain.

She walked over to her wall to pick up the shattered picture frame. The picture was of the Golden Trio, as they had been dubbed. It had been taken a mere month before the battle, and if you looked close, you could almost see the strain etched in the lines of their faces, more prominent on Harry's. They did a good job at hiding it, all three knowing that time was short so they had best spend it the best they could. The training could be called anything but fun to most, but her, Harry, and Ron had decided they would make the best of it.

For almost a year leading up to the battle, they would train. Usually dueling, but they would occasionally get training in other areas as well, such as extra Transfiguration and Charms. Professors McGonagall and Flitwick knew their subjects better than anyone, and taught them ways to use the subject to help add defense or offense to their duels. Hermione, in true Hermione fashion, was also going once a week to Madam Pomfrey to learn as much about healing magic as she could. In light of future events, she figured this was wise.

Dueling sessions usually occurred on weekend nights, or whenever Professor Snape decided to call one. No one argued when Dumbledore had told them Snape would be overseeing and teaching the dueling; who else had as much first hand combat & defensive experience as the Ex-Death-Eater-Turned-Spy-For-The-Light, except maybe Dumbledore himself? Snape decided that sporadic & spontaneous training sessions were good for the mind, so it wasn't unusual for them to be eating dinner on a weekday night and have Snape come by and request a "word" in his office. They knew that a "word" translated into "I'm going to curse the shit out of you, so you better be prepared."

Occasionally, Tonks or Remus would show up to the training sessions and help them out. Kingsley could be counted on to show up whenever his schedule permitted, as would Draco.

Draco, Hermione thought. Now THERE's a mystery wrapped in an enigma surrounded by a puzzle. No one, except the always omniscient Dumbledore, could have predicted that the once pompous, spoiled, aristocratic heir would grow into a courageous man, who finally got tired of his father and his lifestyle. In the beginning of their sixth year, word was Draco was given a task by Voldemort himself. No one, not even Harry, knew what the details were. The only one Draco told was Dumbledore. (Snape, being a spy, had already heard since he was at the meeting.) When Snape had come back from said meeting, he immediately went to tell Dumbledore of the plans. He had only talked for roughly 15 minutes, however, when Dumbledore's door announced Draco Malfoy was requesting an audience as soon as possible, and that it was urgent. Snape Disillusioned himself and watched as Draco Malfoy, sole heir to the Malfoy fortune, property, and name, came clean to Dumbledore about everything. He explained how he was sickened by his father; how he hated the lifestyle he was thrust into and was forced to keep appearances to; how he hated looking into Voldemort's cold red eyes and seeing a reflection of his father. He voluntarily offered to take Veritaserum to prove himself to Dumbledore. That was as much as Hermione had found out about him. Whatever Draco had said, it was enough to convince both Dumbledore and Snape.

Since then, Draco had been joining in whatever training sessions they were doing, including joining her for her medi-training, even when the other two boys decided that they had no use for the added learning of healing spells and potions. The first time he had walked into the dueling training, all hell had broken loose. Luckily, Dumbledore had anticipated this and had a shield on Draco as he walked in. *Sometimes I think Dumbledore gets odd amusement at confusing others,* she thought. *He could've walked in first and saved a lot of time at dodging curses that were bouncing off Draco by just explaining.* Hermione rolled her eyes, and once again reminded herself that it would take longer than she had to live to figure out the workings of Albus Dumbledore's mind.

It took some time, but eventually Ron, Harry, Hermione, and Draco were able to coexist. Draco still played his role as arrogant bastard during school hours, but at training sessions he was a completely different person. He was still pompous and a bastard, but also occasionally showing a nicer side, a funny side. The Trio understood completely why he acted the way he did; Snape was in a similar boat. They had to continue to pretend like they were better, mudbloods were scum, and Harry was useless (although in Snape's case, that might be his true feelings...). Maybe they didn't consider one another FRIENDS, but certainly they were acquaintances who could work together.

It finally seemed like things were going well for the Light. *And they DID go well, didn't they?* she thought. *You all knew what the risk was in war. Everyone knew there was a chance they would die.*

Yes, that was true. However, it seemed like the people who had already accepted the fact they wouldn't live to the end of the battle were the ones who survived.

Dumbledore was still reigning as Headmaster at Hogwarts, waiting to reopen the school and welcome everyone back with the ever-present twinkle in his eyes, ready to put everything behind him and start training the witches and wizards for the new Voldemort-free future.

Draco was coming back to restart and complete his seventh and final year at Hogwarts, as were the other students whose education had been disrupted due to the battle. He was now a lone Malfoy, however. His mother, Narcissa, had died on the battlefield, fighting for the Dark until the end. The end, however, came when she came face to face with her son for the first time since he had left the Death Eater meeting almost a year and a half previously. It finally hit her that he had turned on the family and went his separate way. She had let out an angry, heartbroken yell and shot off the curse to end her son's life; Draco didn't even raise his wand to defend himself. At that point, however, Harry had pushed Draco to the ground as Moody simultaneously shot a curse at her. She went down, and Draco ran off into battle with Harry, not looking back. Lucius Malfoy had escaped Azkaban by flaunting his money, knowing Minister Fudge could be counted on to be crooked when Galleons were involved. He then proceeded to formally disown his son and cut him off from everything. Hermione didn't know where Draco had been staying since then.

Snape was continuing as Potions master; however this time, he assured them, he would hate all his students equally, and not favor the Slytherins, since he no longer needed to.

Most surprised by his continuing life was Harry. He would also be coming back for the school year.

No one knew the exact details of what had finally finished Voldemort. If you asked Harry, he either couldn't or wouldn't tell. The last hour of battle was the worst; it was pure chaos, with curses firing from every direction and not knowing if they were from friends or foes. It was like being sucked into the very deepest, darkest pit of Hell; dust from the school rained down making thick white dust, while smoke from the many fires mixed; people, Light and Dark fighters alike, fell from the rooftops and open windows and towers all along the castle, some being pushed, or jumped, knowing they were cornered & would soon die anyway. All around, Hermione heard screaming and yelling, crying and cursing, and the tell-tale sound of bodies hitting all over the grounds and the roofs around her. Time would slow, and she would be able to take in all her surroundings, however much she didn't want to.

Then, it all happened very fast: somewhere between the sinister green lights emitting all around and the dust, Harry had seen enough to make him angrier than ever.

Everyone heard him let out an angry bellow, and curses started flying out from his wand faster than people could make out. Even with the restricted sight from the dust, everyone knew where Voldemort and Harry dueled by watching the lights, and everyone kept clear of the space, except Dumbledore who could be heard trying to fight his way over, to be of assistance. Suddenly, there was the worst scream of all: a gut wrenching, painful scream full of anguish and hatred combined. Everyone in the vicinity paused, and as the fighting ceased, the smoke cleared. With it, the broken, lifeless body of Voldemort lay crumpled at Harry's feet.

Dumbledore appeared out of the crowd and in a trice had the horrified Death Eaters corralled. The survivors and less injured were becoming aware of what had happened and set to work clearing the smoke and looking for wounded and deceased; celebrations could wait. Harry, however, stood in the same spot, still looking down. As the smoke cleared more, it became clear what had finally set him off: Ron Weasley also lay on the ground, his lifeless eyes still in the same narrowing shape they were when he fell, as if he was still struggling to see through the smoke so he could help his best friend.

As the day wore on, body recovering commenced, as did the clean-up. The dead Death Eaters were set aside in tent conjured by Dumbledore. The captured Death Eaters were all magically bound and stunned, in a magically warded tent next to their dead, with Aurors guarding the outside. The injured were all brought to the Hospital Wing, and mediwitches and wizards from St. Mungo's were on site to assist Madam Pomfrey.

The fallen heroes of the Light were laid down in the Great Hall in rows. No one wanted to leave them outside and felt they deserved more. Hermione knew she would never forget the sight she saw when she at last entered the Hall after helping bring the last injured to Pomfrey and convincing Harry to finally move.

Among those laying in the Hall next to Ron were the other members of the Weasley family that had fallen: Percy, proud and haughty, who had come to his senses in the middle of Hermione's sixth year and had been a huge contribution to the Light, using his connections in the ministry to both spy and recruit; Arthur, fun-loving and sure, who refused to leave Molly's side the entire battle, until his demise. It was after Bellatrix struck him down that Molly took her grief and anger out on Bellatrix, who thanks to Molly, was lying in the deceased Death Eaters tent. The survivors of the family were all huddled around the three men, Molly and Ginny kneeling or hunched over sobbing, the twins supporting one another on one side, with Charlie and Bill in the same position on the other.

Also lying in the hall was Hagrid, who had to be hit by five separate Death Eater curses to finally bring him down; Kingsley, who had taken at least six Death Eaters with him before he went; Viktor Krum, who had been recruiting people in Bulgaria and in his travels to join up with the Light; Pansy Parkinson, who surprised everyone at the beginning of the summer by joining up with what she called "the right side"; the Creevey brothers, both Dennis and Colin, who had learned enough from worshipping Harry about the secret passages into Hogwarts and had snuck back in to fight, and so many others. The Great Hall was filled with the dead and the surviving friends and families trickling in and walking around.

Yes, Hermione thought wryly, *it was most definitely the people who DIDN'T think about death as an option who were the first to go down.*

Hermione came back out of her thoughts with a sigh, looked down at the broken frame, gave up with a roll of her eyes, and muttered the inevitable *leaparo* whilst tapping it once with her wand. She stared at it for a second longer, then, with an impatient swipe at her eyes, she carefully wrapped the picture and frame up in old pages of the *Daily Prophet*, and laid it gently in her trunk, in a pouch she transfigured from a button and attached to the top portion.

She glanced at the pouch once more, muttered a concealment charm, then turned her back to the trunk, picture, and memories, and resumed her cleaning and packing, blinking hard and banishing all traces of tears.