

A Series of Genuine Conversations

by Laralee

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Characters are property of J.K. Rowling and the Harry Potter Universe. Thankfully, she allows me to borrow them for a bit of fun.

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Practically orphaned...for lack of a better word...at an early age, he struggled to find his place in the world. He cut a dash, as the saying goes, fleeing from his home life and never looking back. To say it was easy would be to say that water was dry. In his youth, he wasn't well received, and it was fine by him. He was used to being an afterthought. As far as he was concerned, he didn't need anyone but himself. In hindsight, however, he realized how incredibly foolish this notion was. Everyone needs someone, even if they feel they do not deserve it. Nevertheless, his quick wit and the manner in which he could produce a flow of words was his weapon of choice early on, but that soon changed as his fondness of the Dark Arts grew. This attachment to unsavory magic would eventually be the card that trumped the only friendship he had known. Again, in retrospect, he realized their relationship was doomed for failure even before it began. He clung to Lily Evans like a life vest; he needed her to keep his head above the abysmal, shadowy waters that represented his home life and lack of self-worth. She never needed him in the same way, and for that very reason, their friendship never had a solid foundation to stand on.

Since the Second Wizarding War had ended, his presence was in high demand. He received invitations to highly publicized Ministry functions, where they planned to honor him and other 'war heroes' with food, drink and pleasant conversation. He always declined, as such frivolities didn't appeal to him in the slightest. No, what he really wanted was to get on with his life. All he desired at thirty-eight years of age was a life that would be as carefree as possible and a sound mind with which to enjoy such a contented life. Truth be told, he had only been to one of those functions, and it had been his last. He couldn't complain because, during that same ceremony he had

supposedly attended in his honor, he realized he had been given an opportunity to have a pleasant existence after all.

The more he thought of her, the more he realized she wasn't unlike him, though the two of them appeared to be steadfastly opposite. One wouldn't expect oil and water to mix, but he and Hermione Granger had developed a sort of association. By sheer happenstance, the two of them had been seated next to each other at the aforementioned ceremony. She never bothered to speak to him, which, at first, struck him as odd. She remained silent for most of the night, except when she received the well wishes and praise of others; only then did she offer any sort of utterance. She was polite, though the appreciation she gave in return lacked any authentic feeling. Near the end of the evening, when the time came to remember those who had fallen, Hermione Granger excused herself from the table and quietly fled to a balcony outside the ballroom.

He could remember it just as if it had happened yesterday. He didn't know what unknown force urged him from his chair, but something did so. He eased himself just as quietly from his seat and exited through the same archway she had escaped through not moments before. There she stood at the railing's edge, draped in the soft glow of the summer moon, staring out into the London skyline. He made his presence known by walking uncharacteristically heavy on the stone; she turned to see her new company, but offered no other kind of acknowledgement. He sauntered over to take the empty space next to her, never saying a word. Moments later, the very first genuine conversation they had took place.

"This was a mistake." She said it without taking her eyes off the night sky. It was almost as if she wasn't even talking to him, but rather herself.

He looked down at her, trying to make sense of what she was saying. He was taken aback when she caught him staring at her with such intensity, though she didn't seem affected by it in the least.

"All of those people in there," she began, a hint of contempt in her voice, "they know nothing of what they speak. They claim to offer their sincerest thanks, but all they really want is my account of the ordeal. I wish they would leave me be."

"If we had to deal with all who gave false sentiments, Miss Granger, I'm afraid we would never be done with them. There will always be people of that nature."

"They are eager to place us on a pedestal like some piece of invaluable artwork. They gape and gawk, trying to make discussion, but I want none of it. War is not something to be glorified. I am not a hero. I only did what I had to do out of necessity, not bravery. I just want things to be the way they were, I want the people I love back in my life. I don't want this celebrity."

He knew exactly where she was coming from, for he shared the same desires. "It will never be as it was."

She turned to leave, seemingly unaware of the comment he made. She had almost disappeared through the archway when she turned to him. "So I've noticed."

That was the first time he got a glimpse of the young woman he used to call his student. He had to admit that the war had shaped her into a much more reserved person, and he wasn't quite sure what to make of her. He didn't see her for a few months after that, and again, it was coincidence he ran into her the second time.

He considered Muggle literature his guilty pleasure, so he would frequent Muggle book stores in an attempt to liven his collection of tomes. He had traveled to the heart of London on a sleepy Sunday afternoon to visit a hole in the wall store that dealt specifically with antiquarian and second-hand books. His visit had been relatively uneventful and quiet until he approached the counter to pay. There, standing in front of him, was the head of hair he could not deny. This time, he had his second genuine conversation with her, and one that, he would come to find, would form the foundation for their friendship.

"Good afternoon."

The young woman in front of him jumped, startled by the closeness of such a familiar voice. She spun around, dropping a book from atop her mountainous stack. He managed to pluck it out of the air with a swift movement and held it out to her.

She took the book from his hand and placed it back on her pile. "Professor Snape, you scared me. I must say you were the last person I expected to see here."

"That much I gathered, Miss Granger."

She smiled at him slightly before her eyes traveled to the book he had selected. "Heart of Darkness?"

"I'm sure some would say it's a rather fitting title."

"Your heart is anything but dark, sir."

He said nothing, slightly stunned that she would say something of that nature. She thumped the novel with her finger, bringing him back into their conversation.

"I never cared much for it. But I must praise Conrad for his attention to detail. The scenes in his work are quite vivid, though somewhat hard to follow."

"You've read it?" he asked, though he already knew her response.

"Yes I have. I find it to be a tedious read, though I must admit I have read it more than once."

"But you said you didn't care much for it. Why would you read it again if it affected you so?"

"I wouldn't be a proper reader if I didn't try to appreciate it. By the third time around, I truly thought I was going as nutty as some of the characters."

This time it was his turn to try out a smile. The two of them continued their chat as they waited to pay for their books. Much to his surprise, they somehow managed to carry it on through the streets of London, while they sat at a table outside a small café, and until he walked her to her door sometime later that evening. They talked about nothing in particular, keeping to the familiar salutations of 'Professor Snape' and 'Miss Granger,' as it was much too soon for anything else.

"It was nice to see you again, Professor. I have enjoyed the afternoon."

"It has been... pleasant."

She nodded at the book in his hand. "Once you finish that, I'd like to know what you think of it."

"I'm sure that can be arranged. I'll let you know when I've finished it."

That night, once he returned to his own home, he read the entire book in a single sitting. He realized by the end of the first few chapters that it wasn't his cup of tea, but he braved the madness because he knew that waiting for him at the end of the book was another chance to meet with her. He did not wait for the dawn of a new day to contact her. He sent the letter by owl post, requesting her presence at the café they had had tea that very same day. She replied in haste, not even an hour later, with her acceptance.

The next day, he traveled back to the city of London, arriving a half an hour early. He waited, novella in hand, and though he would have never admitted it then, slightly anxious. She arrived exactly on time, and during the course of their lunch, they discussed a great deal more than shortcomings of *Heart of Darkness*. Their third genuine conversation would shed light on the ghosts of their pasts as well as their plans pushing forward.

"Do you ever wish things could be the way they were?"

"Of course not. While the world is much different than it was before, it is a considerably better place now that the Dark Lord is gone."

"I guess you're right. Though after I lost Ron and Harry, I thought I had lost everything. The war is over, but I am still feeling its effects...not as much, but it still hurts."

"It doesn't do to dwell in the past. If one spends all their time looking back, how they can ever hope to see what lies ahead?"

"You sound like Dumbledore."

She never ceased to amaze him with the comments she could come up with. "I don't know whether I should be offended or flattered by such a comment."

"I meant it as a compliment. Albus Dumbledore was a good man."

"Yes, I suppose he was."

"You miss him." It wasn't a question, more of a statement of fact.

"His memory crosses my mind occasionally."

"They all cross my mind, a little more often than occasionally, I hate to admit."

"It is not something to be ashamed of, Miss Granger."

She looked down at her empty plate. "You don't think me weak?"

"You're not weak. You only need to find your way is all, just like everyone else."

"If only it were that easy."

"It most certainly isn't easy. Life, I have come to find, has a mind of its own. One only needs to trust its judgment enough to face the whatever future it may decide to give you."

"I think I might be ready to do that. Here's to moving forward." She raised her glass in the air and flashed a brilliant smile.

"To moving forward." Their glasses clanked together, and for the first time in quite a long time, he felt a contentedness about him that had been a long time in coming.

Their meetings grew in frequency, and he eventually evolved from Professor Snape to Severus, and she from Miss Granger to Hermione. Those who knew them thought the newfound association to be somewhat unexpected, but deserving of both of them. Though he never realized this until much later, life had a way of giving him exactly what he needed. Life, in its infinite wisdom, doesn't always give a person the people they believe they want. Life always gives them the people they need. Whether they be the sort of people who wound, the people who heal, the people who teach, the people who listen, the people who build up, and those who tear down, but most importantly, it gives the people who will turn someone into the person they were always capable of being...the person they were meant to be.

"I don't think I could thank you enough for that recommendation. I would have never gotten that job had it not been for you." She wrapped her arms tightly around his torso in an appreciative hug. To him, it meant something a little more, though he wouldn't divulge that sort of information to her until much later.

"You could have gotten it in your sleep, Hermione. I merely told them what they already knew."

"At any rate, Severus, I don't think I could have done it without you. Regardless of the recommendation, you were the one who convinced me I should go for it."

"You're welcome, but enough about me. Tell me more about this position the Ministry Press has offered you."

"They are starting a new division, one that has primary correspondence with the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. I'll be researching and writing the briefings for the cases dealing with fugitive criminals from the war. It's very exciting work, they say."

He knew exciting was just a honey-coated term for hazardous, but he also knew she was more than capable of handling anything that should come her way. For the first time, he could tell she was happy, and that was all that mattered.

"Celebrations appear to be in order. That is, if you are available this evening."

"I'm always available when you are involved, Severus. What do you have in mind?"

And so they celebrated. The celebration was not of a spectacular fashion, but simply a small gathering of those who knew them both, coming together to commemorate her achievements. More importantly, however, they gathered to celebrate the fact that she was given a fresh start, free from the memories that plagued her while she slept...a fresh start where she no longer felt guilty about not remembering, but rather spent her days moving forward as it should be. Though the festivities were for her, they were just as important for him. They convinced him that he finally belonged. No more hiding amongst the shadows or refusing people because it was a necessary sacrifice. He was accepted as he was, and he had never felt more alive in all of his life.

As their newfound friendship found its way nearing the year mark, he decided to stop being a coward. He had always hated that word, but he found himself using the unsavory term to describe his behavior. He wasn't usually one to fear things, but it terrified him to think of losing everything he had gained. He made a resolution, a resolution that, if he had his way, would lead to the most genuine conversation the two of them would ever have.

She was late. If anything couldn't be refuted about her, it was her punctuality. He checked his wall clock once more. It was almost nine in the evening, making her a little over an hour overdue. He was growing restless, as was his mounting agitation as the seconds ticked on. Tonight, rather than go to the annual Wizarding War Memorial Ceremony, they had made plans for a quiet evening in. Of all nights for her to be late, she would pick this one. The one he had fretted over all day, in an attempt to make it just so. He had bought her favorite wine, had reread the chapter they were to discuss, and had played out the most important conversation he would ever have with her. Tonight, after their study, he planned to let her know how he felt. Breaking from his pacing, he sat down and began to reflect. It did little to calm his nerves, as his mind told him scandalous tales of how she couldn't possibly be interested and that she had had some inkling to his intentions and wanted nothing more to do with him. He eventually realized this sort of behavior walked the fine line of stupidity and paranoia...it simply wouldn't do to settle on such nonsensical thoughts.

After the clock struck half past nine, he found himself contemplating going to her home when his fireplace roared to life. Through the green flames he could hear a familiar voice. It wasn't her voice coming from his firebox, but that which belonged to Arthur Weasley. Seconds later, the red-haired man burst into his home, making him wonder for all the world why the Weasley patriarch had come to call on him at this hour. Arthur's solemn expression did little to appease him, and the subsequent conversations would forever shape him.

"Arthur?"

"Severus, I apologize for intruding, but this is urgent. There has been an attack. As for who was involved, the Auror Office is not sure. We believe..."

"Where?" He didn't care about any of the technicalities. All he wanted to know was why it was relevant to him.

"Diagon Alley...a little more than two hours ago. They struck... the Ministry Press. Several are dead and many more seriously hurt."

He felt a bizarre quivering, a continual vibration, which started in the bottoms of his feet and moved up to his legs before finally settling in his chest. No matter how hard he tried, he could not keep himself from shaking slightly. His mouth went suddenly dry, making it difficult for him to form his words. "Has something happened to Hermione?"

The older man fidgeted with his hands as he turned his gaze to the floor. "She has been taken to St. Mungo's for treatment. That's all I know."

He said nothing more to Arthur Weasley as he grabbed his cloak and Disapparated from his sitting room with a loud crack. He arrived out of thin air to the rain drenched street outside St. Mungo's. The few people around him were just starting to detect something out of the ordinary, as many of them glanced at him with a peculiar look plastered upon their faces. Under normal situations, Severus would have been more careful around Muggles, but they were the least of his worries. He bumped into a confused-looking gentleman as he pushed through the dilapidated building front and into the hospital's interior.

"Hermione Granger. I was told she was brought here. Can you tell me where?" The witch behind the information kiosk looked up from her parchments, a grave expression on her face. She nodded down the hall toward the Urgent Care Ward, but never said anything else to him. He moved swiftly down the corridor until he came to another kiosk station. A wizard in lime green robes, noticing his anxious state, approached him.

"I'm looking for a friend," he stammered, "Hermione Granger. The woman at the entrance told me sh..."

"I am so sorry, sir. I'm afraid..."

He clutched the Healer's green robes in his hands as his knees threatened to buckle under him. He wasn't prepared for this. He could not go through this, not again. "Don't tell me this. I just want to see her."

"Sir..."

"Please. You must let me see her, if only for a minute. Please, I beg you."

The Healer studied the distraught man in front of him. Knowing he was going against protocol, he pointed to a closed door about fifteen feet down the hall. "I cannot permit anyone unless they are family. Are you family, Mister..."

He stared at the wizard, trying his level best to formulate a coherent thought. He knew what the Healer was getting at, so he pushed his emotion aside and managed to say what would grant him access. "My name is Snape and, yes, I am family."

"Very well, Mister Snape. Go to her, but take heed, she is most unwell. She is unresponsive...it would be unwise to set your hopes high."

It was as if time had stood still when he opened the door to where she was. He wasn't prepared for what he saw, as the sight of her was his undoing. He stood stock-still in the doorway, deep in thought, his eyes fixed upon her motionless body. A wild, sudden feeling of wrath coupled with a nauseating nervousness roused him from his thoughts. Retribution would come later and he would see to it, but for right now, during this delicate moment, she was his only concern. He stayed with her that night and would, without a shred of doubt, have the conversation that would change his life forever.

He sat down rigidly in the seat nearest her. He reached out to touch her, but stopped. This wasn't how this was supposed to happen. "You're very late, Hermione. Though given your current state, I can see your tardiness was of no fault of your own."

She, not unlike the first time he had meet her after the war, did not speak to him. She did not stir, lying on her back, her features calm, her wild hair in a halo around her pale face. She did nothing apart from breathe, but he continued to speak to her as if she were listening with the smile on her face he had come to cherish.

"I want you to listen carefully to what I am about to say. I spent many sleepless nights trying to determine the best way to go about this. Please know that what I have to tell you would have been said this night regardless of the circumstances that brought it about."

He paused a moment to gather himself. "To know there was someone else who wanted the exact same as I did was comforting beyond belief. I have thought long and hard about the words to say to you. Understand that words adequate to truly express how grateful I am to have had you come into my life do not exist in this world. This is but a meager attempt to put into words my sincerest gratitude and thankfulness. All my life I have been living in the darkest night I have ever known, a ceaseless night, through which I have wandered aimlessly. Then, if by some glorious chance, I could see the blinding light of a precious new day just beyond the horizon, a new day to change my life. You are my sunrise, the promise of a new day and a new beginning that has brought be from the depths of myself."

She remained silent and still, but he pushed forward, this time taking her hands in his. He had revealed too much to stop.

"I feel as if I have waited for you all my life. I will continue to wait for you, Hermione. I will wait for you until you come back to me whether that day be tomorrow or my last. Even though I'll never know what lies ahead, I'm never letting go. You are loved, silly girl, so deeply loved, and so it does not go wasted, you must allow me a chance to show you how much. Please, do not deny me. I won't make it any other way."

So there he sat with his head hung as the quiet tears finally came. There, in her darkened hospital room, he held both of her hands in his as he nursed an ache in his heart that he hadn't felt for nearly twenty years. Prior to this evening, as he replayed in his head the events of their meetings and that of their growing relationship, he felt hopeful for the first time in his life. Hermione Granger had been the light he needed to beckon him from his solitary hole in the darkness. She had been what Lily Evans couldn't. To her, he wasn't an afterthought. She needed him, just as much as he needed her, and by fate, they had been brought together by the most ordinary of situations. But as it could be, and usually was, fate was wretchedly unpredictable and had a way of throwing everything off balance. There, in his chair, he was attacked by a strong feeling of doubt, a feeling of uneasiness, a feeling of terror, that he had missed his opportunity for happiness. He squeezed her hands tightly, for fear of her slipping from him forever.

She returned the gesture.

It was a simple movement, but one that pushed any and all apprehension from his mind instantly. It appeared life had finally decided to give him a fair hand after all.

Author's Notes:

As always, reviews are welcomed and greatly appreciated. This story was written today, during my end-of-the year teacher's meeting. This particular story found its first home on the back of my agenda page and several napkins. It's odd how a stray thought can just take root, grow and all out refuse to leave until it makes its presence fully noted. Somehow, I managed to get this entire thing down in a little over an hour, as it practically wrote itself. I only hope it finds each of you with joy.