

Whispering Your Name

by neelix

Ron calls on his former Professor for help.

One

Chapter 1 of 3

Ron calls on his former Professor for help.

A/N: *shuffles in, adjusts underwear, fixes glasses back on face...*

Hello! I know it's been an age. How have you been? You look amazing! Have you lost weight??

Moving on - a little song inspired story - link to the song and lyrics at the end. Please review if you feel you want to.

'Dear Professor Snape,

Welcome back to Hogwarts. Well, I don't mean welcome back because I'm not there any more, thank Merlin, but I know you are now and probably because you're all healed and everything so... well, that's good.

I'm writing to you about Hermione, sir. She's here with me, now. I don't mean she's helping me write this. It's probably obvious that she's not so I don't need to tell you that. She's not reading over my shoulder either. I got a right earful for doing that when she was reading the Prophet the other day I can tell you. But anyway... I'm worried about her, sir.

I never thought I'd want to see you again after school, let alone talk to you, but this is important. Can we meet, sir? Please?

Yours,

Ron Weasley'

Snape folded the parchment and slipped it into his inside pocket, then walked the short, cobbled street in slow steps towards the Leaky Cauldron. It was over a month since he had received Weasley's letter, and at first he had ignored it. He was still ill, his recovery painful and exhausting, and by rights he should just be letting the young warriors of Hogwarts get on with their lives free of the spectre of remembering him. But the damn situation niggled. If she were sick; hexed, perhaps, or worse, some spell that was eating her from the inside. If he could help her as she had helped him. It was the least he could do.

The noise from inside the pub assaulted him as he opened the door, but the loud conversation immediately reduced to a low hum, followed by hushed whispers as the news of his presence spread. Someone unseen started to clap, and soon the whole clientele were standing and applauding this wounded hero of wizards and Muggles alike. His first reaction was to turn and immediately leave, but a gentle hand on his shoulder stopped him.

'This way, Professor.' The sound of Harry Potter's voice in his ear was irritatingly reassuring, and Snape allowed himself to be guided to a booth at the very back of the

pub. He found Weasley waiting, his face pale as he wrung his hands together anxiously. All thoughts of himself vanished as a rush of panic hit his gut.

'Tell me what is wrong with Miss Granger,' he said, leaning over the scrubbed table to better hear the tale of woe.

Ron Weasley stared at him without speaking, his eyes immediately drawn to red, ugly scar at his throat. Snape had thought to hide it, but the sooner people were used to it the sooner it would be old news. He watched as Weasley licked his lips nervously, and noticed the slight tremor of his left hand. Harry Potter sat beside him, looked at Snape and shrugged.

'Potter, get Weasley a firewhisky for his nerves. Coffee for me, I cannot drink alcohol now.' Snape felt slightly gratified at the smile on Potter's face. They were almost friends, since Potter had been his only visitor in all of his months of recuperation at St Mungo's, but this was the first time they had met since his discharge. Potter had written to him, regularly, but Snape hadn't been ready for real life encounters and he wasn't sure that he was, even now. He should have guessed that Weasley would bring him along for moral support or perhaps, Snape smirked inwardly, for protection.

A steaming cup of black coffee was placed in front of him, and the swirling, aromatic stream rising from its muddy surface was like foreplay to his senses. He had discovered a love of good coffee after sampling the dishwater they served up at St Mungo's. Potter had been very good for some things; he had to give him that.

'Drink it, Weasley. It will loosen your tongue.' Snape gestured to the glass of amber liquid that was clutched tightly in his chubby-fingered hand, and Ron Weasley downed the whisky immediately as if he'd been Imperio'ed.

'She's sick.' Weasley voice cracked as he spoke, and Snape couldn't help but notice the frown on Potter's face as he laid a hand on Weasley's arm.

'Not ill, sir,' Potter corrected him. 'What Ron means is that she's not herself. Go on, Ron. He needs to know.'

'She is sick, Harry. You've seen it yourself.' Ron's eyes flashed angrily in Harry's direction.

'Calm down, Ron.' Harry again put his hand on his arm. 'I'm sorry, Professor, but this whole thing has Ron very upset.'

'As I can see. Perhaps, Weasley, it would better to start at the beginning?' Snape lifted his coffee and inhaled slowly before taking a sip.

'The beginning? Yes... Good idea. The beginning was when she told me she was shagging you.' Weasley paused and looked into Snape's eyes for the first time, his glare a mix of anger and pain. As if suddenly remembering who he was speaking to, he added, 'Sir' with more than a hint of sarcasm in his tone.

Snape felt the coffee cup tip and spill its hot contents in the direction of his nether regions, and yet again he was grateful for Harry Potter and his magic wand.

Two

Chapter 2 of 3

Ron calls on his former Professor for help.

Snape could feel himself trembling beneath his robes.

They knew. And if they knew it followed that other people also knew, his colleagues, perhaps, or students he was currently teaching. He was used to being judged by those around him, for good or ill. But this; this was different. This involved another, an innocent, sweet and loving soul who did not deserve the derision of being associated with an ex-Death Eater. Worse was the stigma of sleeping with her Professor, a man whose behaviour should have been beyond reproach, in that area at least. What trials had she endured at his expense? The name calling, the shame... Gods, Hermione, why... But it wasn't her fault. He could have stopped it, damn it, he should have. But she was there, showing him kindness he had never known, caring and tending his injuries, understanding his position and yet accepting him, encouraging him, making him smile, even. He had been weak, vulnerable. He had needed her, and she had been willing, enthusiastic and insistent.

Snape's thoughts were tumbling over themselves, panic mixed with enduring memories. He forgot he had an audience and that his face was more than likely mirroring his feelings. He steeled himself, forcing himself to sit up straight and his face to resume its mask of indifference.

'Whatever it is you think you know, Weasley, I fear you are mistaken,' he drawled.

Ron leapt from his seat and lurched towards Snape, ready to punch him, his fist drawn back. Snape had drawn his wand before he had chance to go further, but it was Harry who stopped them both. A Barrier Charm forced them apart, pushing them both flat against the backs of the wooden booth.

'Bloody hell, Harry! The git deserves it,' Ron growled out, rubbing his shoulders where the force of the charm had shoved him hard against the bench.

'That's as maybe, Ron, but you want answers, not a fight. I thought you wanted to help Hermione, not make it worse?' Harry's voice was steady but firm and the reasoning tone obviously worked. Ron's shoulders slumped, his anger gone and replaced with a sully glare in Snape's direction.

'As for you, sir,' Harry looked at Snape, 'It would be helpful if you could just be truthful. Hermione told both of us about the two of you, and I believe her. If you choose not to be honest, then perhaps what happened meant more to her than it did to you, and you were just using her, which is what Ron thinks already.'

Snape's guard fell. 'I would never have used her, Potter. Do you think I make a habit out of bedding students?' He rubbed his face with his hands, exhaustion sweeping over him like a heavy, dull fog.

'I never thought that, sir. Hermione didn't tell us everything, but from what she said, you did care for her, didn't you?' Harry was answering him but looking at Ron, who just scowled.

'Of course I bloody cared.' Snape sighed.

'Well, if you care so much, why haven't you written to her, then, or tried to make contact?' Ron sat forward indignantly.

'Your witch is not the only person to read the Prophet, and I made it my business to catch up on every back issue once I regained consciousness. I know she is with you now, Weasley, and I don't make a habit of chasing another man's witch.' Snape looked at Ron briefly before looking away. The news that Hermione had taken up with Weasley had cut him deeply, but then he couldn't blame her. He had promised her nothing and pushed her away. He wasn't meant to survive, for Merlin's sake, and he couldn't stand the thought of Hermione's grief if he had allowed things to continue. But thinking of her with Weasley... He didn't want to ponder it a moment longer than he

had to.

'She only came to me when you let her go, you know.' Ron's voice had dropped to a soft murmur. 'She said you had told her that you didn't want her any more. You couldn't have hurt her more if you'd tried.'

'I had no choice. She wasn't safe being close to me. Voldemort was calling me to his side every other day, and although I am a strong Occlumens, I couldn't risk him seeing Hermione in my thoughts. I did what I did to protect her. Believe me; I hurt myself twice as much.' The memory of Hermione's face streaked with silent tears as he ended things swam before him, and the haunted look in her eyes in Potions class. He had done that to her, and it had almost killed him. He wanted to tell he was sorry, that he was wrong. That he loved her.

'I can't be what she wants me to be, Snape. I've tried so hard to be there, to love her as much as I can, but it's not me she needs. It's you.' Ron closed his eyes, and Snape was shocked to see a tear fall and be roughly brushed aside. 'She keeps calling your name in her sleep, you see. At first I thought they were just dreams, a force of habit that she would get over eventually, but it's more than that. Tell him, Harry.'

'It's true, sir. Sometimes she just sits staring into space. We can't get her interested in anything, sometimes she even forgets to eat. But then I found this, sir.'

From his pocket Harry pulled out a small book, which he quickly enlarged and handed to Snape. He recognised it immediately as the journal Hermione would sit with beside his fire and write in. He stared at the beaten red leather cover, remembering the feel of it, resting his hands where she would have laid hers.

'You need to read the last entry. Things have got a lot worse since then. Sometimes she doesn't even get out of bed.' Harry frowned as he spoke, and Snape realised that he wasn't there for Ron at all, but for Hermione. Her well-being mattered to him too. Snape turned the thick, parchment pages of the book, entranced by the familiar writing. He noticed the gradual deterioration of her script until the final written page, which seemed to have been scrawled on by a child's hand. He read the words, feeling the pain as it screamed itself from the pages.

'I give up. I thought he loved me, but I was so, so wrong. It's been over six months since he woke from his coma, and Harry told me he was able to speak, and then to read and write, but still nothing. I have waited, Severus... I promised I would and I did... I waited for so long...'

Snape closed the book slowly, his eyes heavy as he gazed back to the pale faces before him.

'What do you want me to do?'

'Make her happy. You loved her, once. She still loves you. I would rather see her happy with you than be ill with me,' Ron whispered. He rose, as did Harry, and they made to leave as Snape handed Hermione's journal back to Harry.

'Don't keep her waiting any longer, Snape.' Ron looked him in the eye, resigned that he would lose Hermione one way or another.

Despite everything, Snape felt a flicker of something in his heart.

Three

Chapter 3 of 3

Ron calls on his former Professor for help.

Hermione was walking in the apple orchard. The sun was warming the trees, and the scent from the heavy boughs of blossom was starting to fill the air. She loved this time of year, with the promise of sunny days ahead and the hints of the harvest to follow. She raised her face to the dapple of light through the branches, letting her eyes close. For the shortest of moments she thought that she felt a familiar presence, but she shook her head and laughed bitterly. She had to forget the past and move on, she knew that now. Severus Snape had been the love of her life, but it was over. And she had tried and failed to find contentment with Ron. Good, kind Ron who loved her more than she would ever love him, who tried so hard to make her happy. She sighed deeply. She felt that she was using him, and it was unfair to always compare him to Severus, but she couldn't help it. Severus was intelligent, and deep, and passionate; so passionate that the intensity had scared her at times. He was incredibly physical in bed, whereas Ron was gentle and tried to be romantic. Hermione hated lying to him. It wasn't fair, and somewhere in the world was a witch who could truly appreciate him for who he was. She would tell him, soon, that it was over. When she felt stronger.

The sound of a twig snapping broke Hermione from her thoughts, and she turned her head in the direction the sound had come from. She could see little but apple trees, but as she took a step forwards, she gasped. A pair of familiar, dragon hide boots were just visible from behind a tree.

'I can see you,' she said quietly. She held her breath as Severus slipped from his hiding place and stood before her. He looked better than she had expected. His hair was longer, his skin had a healthy glow, and his eyes glittered like black diamonds as he pointedly looked her up and down. She had to physically dig her fingers into the palms of her hands to stop herself rushing to him.

'Why are you here?' She said, trying to keep her tone neutral.

'I wanted to see you. I had heard you were unwell,' he said, taking a small step towards her.

Hermione was unable to stop herself from following his lead, and they walked slowly to each other until they were but a whisper away. She looked up into his face and their eyes met. Her heart was beating hard now, the blood pumping through her veins with such force that she thought she might pass out.

'You look tired,' he said, and concern told in his tone. For some reason this angered her.

'It's none of your business how I feel, or how I look,' she said, her words coming out louder than she had expected. 'You have no right coming here.' Despite her words, she didn't move. Her feet seemed rooted to the earth, her eyes focussed only on his face, and on the wry smile that now crooked his lips.

'You're right, of course. But you should know that I pushed you away for your own safety, and that yours was not the only heart broken that day.'

Severus lifted his hand and tucked a stray curl behind her ear. Hermione closed her eyes at the touch of his cool fingers as they brushed against her cheek, and felt herself waiver on her feet as the familiar scent of him assaulted her. He caught her swiftly, a firm arm about her waist, and pulled her flush against him in the process. Hermione pressed her hands against his cloak, and her fingers absently caressed the buttons as she raised her face to his.

'Ron...' she whispered, even as her lips moved towards his own.

'Knows...' he replied. There was a brief pause, and their lips met. The first, butterfly kiss, tentative and remembering, was replaced by something more certain, sweeter and with the promise of things to come, and his threaded his fingers through her hair to hold her all the more closely. He tasted of bitter coffee and peppermint, and as his tongue teased hers, she smiled.

'Is something amusing you?' He pulled away briefly to speak, but was soon cut off as Hermione covered his mouth with her own for another, more passionate kiss.

'Not amusing so much. I just never thought I would get to see you again, let alone kiss you.' She pulled slowly from his embrace, but caught his hand in hers.

'I have missed you, Hermione Granger.' Severus spoke from the heart, and the truth of it hit him like a train. He had been drifting along since the war, not knowing where to go or what to do, or where he belonged. He knew now.

'Why didn't you write?' Hermione rubbed the tops of his fingers with her thumb.

'You had moved on to Weasley, according to the Prophet.' Severus narrowed his eyes and watched as her emotions played out across her face. She was hopeless at hiding.

'Ron was kind to me, but I have not been fully honest with him. I don't love him, not in the way his wants me to.'

'He contacted me, Hermione. He said... he said you were talking in your sleep.'

'He never told me!' Hermione covered her mouth in horror. What had Ron heard? 'What did I say?'

'My name,' he said softly. 'He said you were whispering my name. I'm hoping that means something.'

Hermione turned and looked back at the Burrow. From the top window, she saw the tell-tale flash of red hair.

'It means I am yours, Severus,' she whispered.

END

Whispering Your Name lyrics (Alison Moyet)

When she said that you were through

I thought that there was nothing that I could do

Just because she ran right here

Doesn't mean I interfered

Now I'm wondering if we can feel the same

'Cause she keeps whispering your name

She keeps on whispering your name

Like she's just waiting

She once told me how she felt

Didn't just want me to hear it from someone else

There were unknowns she couldn't know

But she hoped you two would grow

And when you didn't she was brought to me in pain

And she keeps whispering your name

She keeps on whispering your name

Like she's just waiting

If it's just a little fling, a simple thing I'll try not to pretend

If it's just for jealousy, she's using me

That might be hard to mend

Oh what else can I do

But try to give her more than she got from you

And when she wakes up suddenly

And she says your name to me

I'll just hope it's force of habit and not need

And she keeps whispering your name

she keeps on whispering your name

Like she's just waiting

Oh tell me what is fair

When nothing's wrong

And she just stares

Like she's just waiting

Link to the song :

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b60iBOSPX-g>