

Changing Minds

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After the Dark Lord's rise to power, circumstances allow two people to change their minds about events and each other. Eventual SS/HG.

One

Chapter 1 of 1

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AN: This story starts where HBP ends. The first few chapters will be parallel to DH and largely comply with canon.

Thanks are due to my wonderful alpha/beta-team, MuseyMuse and AmyLouise.

Also, this is my first published fanfic, so I'd love to hear your thoughts. Reviews are much appreciated!

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One

Hermione was sitting at her desk in her bedroom. She had returned home from Hogwarts only two weeks ago, realising just how little her parents' house felt like home to her. After the first year at Hogwarts, she had relished getting back to her old life, a life she'd still perceived as normal. But over the years she had felt more and more out-of-place. Her bedroom felt more like a distant memory of what had been, than anything that was part of her now.

She rubbed her hands over her eyes, looking up from the sheets of parchment lying neatly on her desk. It was dark outside, and the only light came from the old reading lamp on her desk.

Again she rubbed her hands over her eyes, willing the tiredness to go away. Ever since she had returned, she had become more and more exhausted. She was afraid. And lonely. Ron was at his parents, and she would join him soon. She smiled at the thought. Ron. Always so cheerful and boisterous. Always able to take the edge of every unnerving situation. But there was something she had to do first.

Sighing, she returned her attention to the parchments. They contained all her notes on memory charms. After Dumbledore's death she'd made her decision. She needed to protect her parents, and there was only one way.

But memory charms were difficult. She had to be careful. If she wiped too much of their memory they might end up like Gilderoy Lockhart.

Hermione shuddered. If there was one thing in her life she wasn't proud of, it was her silly infatuation with Gilderoy Lockheart. And her unbelievably stupid trust in Snape. He'd betrayed them. He'd proven just how foul, cold-hearted, and evil he was. Far worse, thought Hermione, than that Dark Lord of his.

Shaking her head to clear her thoughts, Hermione rose. She needed tea. A big cup of strong tea to chase away the dark thoughts. She had a memory charm to prepare

and no time to waste.

Just as she was closing the door, she heard it. A creak. From her room. As if the window was being opened. Hermione froze. Her room was on the first floor...who could possibly open the window?

But there it was again. A creak. And something that sounded almost like the rustling of robes.

Without thinking, she thrust the door open, her wand raised. But what she saw made her stop dead. Someone was standing in her room, black robes billowing around him, a nasty smirk playing around his lips.

"You!" Hermione hissed, her wand still raised.

"Good evening to you too, Miss Granger." Snape's drawl was devoid of any emotion.

"Get out!" Hermione spat, pointing at him with her wand.

"Or what?" Snape mockingly raised an eyebrow. "You'll turn me into a toad?"

"I'll..." But she never got any further. With a lazy flick of his wand and a muttered *Expelliarmus!* Snape disarmed her, her wand flying neatly into his outstretched hand.

"No, I didn't think you would, Miss Granger." He was examining her wand now. "I've been your teacher. I know duelling isn't your strong point."

Hermione glared at him. *How dare he*, she thought, so filled with rage that she forgot to be afraid.

"Well, Miss Granger... I believe you were on your way to the kitchen?"

"What do you care?"

"Tea," he replied. Hermione just stared at him. Snape sighed and continued as if he was speaking to an excessively stupid child: "I would like a cup of tea."

"No."

Snape sighed. "Not a very gracious hostess, are you?"

"How dare you break into my house and demand" ...Hermione's voice was shrill with anger... "anything of me?!"

"Indeed." Snape snickered. "If brewing a cup of tea is beyond your skills, perhaps I should kill or torture you instead?"

"Why don't you?" Hermione almost shrieked.

"Why would I?"

Hermione stared at him, her nostrils flaring. "Because I'm on Harry's side."

"Ah, yes." Snape almost looked amused. "You always were full of yourself, Miss Granger. Now, please proceed to the kitchen...or do I have to make you?"

"You can't make me." Hermione squirmed at her own words. They were stupid...and untrue.

"Quite the contrary," Snape drawled, walking closer to her with his wand pointing at her. "Now go. I am not a patient man."

Hermione gave him a last glare before turning around and heading downstairs. She could hear the rustling of his robes behind him and feel his cold eyes boring into the back of her head. Remembering his skill for Legilimency, she desperately tried to think of nothing, but her anger kept clouding her mind.

"I was not aware that I could evoke such feeling," Snape commented, his voice somewhere between amused and teasing.

Hermione turned and glared at him.

"I hate you," she spat.

"Yes, I can see that." Snape met her eyes. "Save it for someone more deserving of it."

"No one is more deserving, I can assure you!"

"Hardly, Miss Granger." Snape's snicker was back again. "Now, tea!"

Without further conversation, they walked into the kitchen. Hermione proceeded to brew two cups of tea while Snape watched her every move. His face was unreadable.

Hermione did consider throwing the kettle into his face. But she also knew it was of no use. He had her wand. Little by little, her reason won over anger. While pouring water slowly into the two cups, she considered Snape's motives: What did he want with her? And why hadn't he done anything yet?

She pushed one cup towards him while eyeing him closely. He looked gaunt *He always looks gaunt!* But he did look more gaunt than normal. His cheeks were more hollow, his skin paler. He looked tired. *Very tired. Serves him right,* Hermione thought.

Snape, however, seemed to be in no hurry to explain what he wanted from her. He was looking at her, his expression still unreadable. The silence between them became tense.

"Well?" Hermione broke the silence. "What do you want from me?"

Snape blinked, then refocused on Hermione. "Your parents."

Hermione straightened instinctively. "They aren't here!"

"I know." Snape looked irritated. "They are at your mother's friend's house, playing bridge."

Hermione stared at him, mouth open. "They aren't..." She broke off.

"In danger?" Snape finished her sentence. "That depends on your will to cooperate."

"Then what do you want?" Hermione's voice had become shrill again. She was frustrated now. What did that man want with her? And why didn't he just get it over with?

Snape, however, slowly raised an eyebrow. "You always were best at theoretical exercises."

Hermione just glared at him. She doubted very much that Severus Snape had broken into her parents' house in order to give her an assessment of her academic performance.

"You are irritated because you cannot deduce why I am here." Snape's voice had become almost like honey. Dark, sweet, sticky honey. "Because you do not know everything. Because you have not been able to prepare yourself." Snape took a sip from his tea. "Because there is no book, no theory, that can prepare you for what is to come."

Somehow, Hermione registered that the last sentence could have been a threat. But it hadn't been...had it? Crossing her arms in front of her chest, in some vain hope of showing defiance, Hermione looked at him. There was very little she could say in reply. She always performed best when she knew the theory. That was why she had always loathed Defence Against the Dark Arts. And Quidditch. Especially Quidditch.

"Tell me what you know," Snape said.

"No," Hermione replied flatly.

Snape inhaled noisily, his eyes narrowing dangerously.

"Miss Granger." He spoke slowly, as if mustering every ounce of patience. "I am quite certain that you have already registered that you are at a disadvantage. You have no wand. I have two. You are a Muggleborn. I am a known Death Eater. Need I spell it out for you?"

He had said Muggleborn. Not Mudblood, but Muggleborn.

"So. Tell. Me. What. You. Know."

"About what?"

"What happened after Dumbledore's death?"

"After you killed him, you mean!" Hermione retorted. Snape's face turned into a mask of anger, disgust, and a loathing so fierce that Hermione shrank back.

"Talk!" Snape hissed.

And so Hermione talked. She said as little as she could, focusing on inane details. Who had been at the funeral, about the eulogy of the little boring man, and about Fawkes. Snape did not seem to mind, but was staring at her with intense eyes as if trying to learn much more from her than she put into words. Hermione was quite certain that he did.

"And after the funeral, the students went home. On the Express." Hermione ended her account.

Snape held her gaze for a while.

"And you are going to change your parents' memory," he stated. Hermione couldn't hide her surprise. Snape merely shrugged. "I've been watching you for some time now. Your plan has been quite transparent."

"You've been watching me?"

"Obviously."

"Why?"

"The Dark Lord has his reasons."

"That's not an answer!" Hermione's voice pitched higher in frustration. Again. She needed to work on that.

"Perhaps not." Snape took another sip of his tea. "As to your parents' memories..."

"What about them?" Hermione felt they were going in circles. Snape was frustrating her, but the more irritated she got, the more he seemed to enjoy the situation. If she didn't know better, she would almost say that he was amused.

"Changing a significant part of someone's mind is very difficult without causing very damaging side-effects."

"I know that," she hissed.

"Let me finish, Miss Granger." Snape's voice was close to a hiss. "You always had a tendency to jump to conclusions. Now is not the time. Patience!"

"Says the man who isn't patient!" Hermione snapped back.

"Would you rather I tortured you, Miss Granger?" The hungry gleam in Snape's black eyes scared her into silence. She shook her head. "Then stay quiet." Snape pinned her with his black orbs for a moment before continuing. "You cannot change their dreams or desires. You can change the importance of them, but you cannot instill needs or desires where none have been. It is a fundamental magic law. Name it."

Hermione stared at her former professor. Was he seriously asking her questions about the Transfiguration syllabus?

Snape's eyebrow was slowly being raised, his expression somewhere between amused and triumphant. "Have I posed a question the famous Hermione Granger, cleverest witch of her generation, cannot answer?"

The sarcasm in his drawl made Hermione glare at him. Again. Not that her glares had any visible effect. Unable to stand Snape's look of triumph she replied: "Gamp's Law of Elemental Transfiguration."

"It seems you have not lost all of your wits, then," Snape drawled. "Though hardly for want of trying."

Snape sipped at his tea again. He seemed to be waiting for something. Hermione kept looking at him, still trying to figure out what was going on. He wasn't here to discuss mind-magic, surely?

After a few moments Snape seemed to become impatient: "Gamp's law ties into your parents' memories how?"

Hermione stared at him. And then with the force of a galloping Hippogriff it hit her. "That is why they won't leave for the States. I've been trying to change their memories for days, and it hasn't worked! It all makes sense." Hermione beamed a smile at her former professor. Snape however was staring at his tea. "Sir?" Hermione's voice had changed. It was kinder, and the shrill tone was gone. Snape lifted his gaze to meet hers, his eyes as cold as ever. "Why are you helping me?"

"You have a task to perform, Miss Granger." His voice had lost any trace of sarcasm or bitterness. Knowing Snape, Hermione was tempted to call it kind. "And your focus on saving your parents is taking your attention from more important matters. The longer you wait, the less preparation will you have. The Dark Lord isn't idle, nor should you be."

Hermione nodded. Despite everything, what Snape said made sense. The only thing that did not make sense was that it was coming from him. From the very man who had betrayed the Order's and...more importantly...*her* trust. From the man who had killed Dumbledore.

"How do I know I can trust you?" she asked, but she did not meet his eyes.

"You don't," he answered. "But you need help if you want to remove yourself from your parents' memory."

Hermione nodded. It was true. It was one of the problems she had pondered during the last few days. That if she cast the charm removing herself from her parents' memory, the charm would be very weak. Her magic would leave a fingerprint in their minds. And a print left by someone as loved as a daughter would leave a memory. Perhaps only a very faint one, but one that would be present and possibly lift the charm.

"Are you suggesting that you do it?" Hermione asked, still perplexed. Whatever she had expected when she had recognized him in her room, this was definitely not it.

"Unless you want your friend Weasley to do it for you?" Snape's voice was dripping with sarcasm. Hermione shook her head.

"But why?" Hermione asked again.

"I've already told you this," Snape replied, sounding irritated. "Potter needs you."

"But we won't begin..." Snape's glare shut Hermione up immediately.

"I know," he replied. "But you might want to prepare yourself."

"And how should I do that? I have no idea what is going to happen..." Hermione's voice was bordering on shrill.

Snape sighed, his eyes flickering to the clock on the wall. "Do you know exactly which questions will be asked of you in the exams, Miss Granger?" His voice had turned into the drawl she knew so well from classes.

She shook her head. Snape's eyebrow was raised inquisitively.

"Of course," Hermione muttered. "I need to prepare for every eventuality." She sighed. "If I only knew what we needed."

"I have to go," Snape said, his eyes at the watch. "Your parents will be home any minute."

Hermione stared at him. He had broken into her house, threatened her with torture, and now he was worried that her parents might catch a glimpse of him?

"They don't bite," she said before thinking.

"But they might contaminate me with their Muggleness." His reply was coated in sarcasm. Hermione shuddered. "I'll be back tomorrow."

With a curt nod Snape turned, his robes billowing around him. He strode purposefully out of the kitchen and through the hall. A few seconds later Hermione heard the front door opening and closing. She sighed, and finally took a sip of her tea. It was cold.

A few minutes later Mr and Mrs Granger entered the kitchen to find their daughter, an almost full cup of tea in her hand, staring at an empty cup on the table.

"Hello, darling!" Mrs Granger said. Hermione looked up, surprised, but managed a small smile. "Had a friend over?" Mrs Granger indicated the empty cup. Hermione looked at it for a moment before replying.

"Yes. You could say that."

"Someone we know?" Mr Granger inquired.

"No, just someone from school."

* * * * *

That night, sleep eluded Hermione. She lay in her bed, staring into the darkness. After her parents had come home, she'd returned to her room, cursing Snape. He'd taken her wand, and somehow he'd made her believe that he was on their side.

To her surprise, she had found her wand lying on her desk. There had been no note, just an open window. Hermione had made sure to lock the window with every defensive and protective spell she could recall.

Again her thoughts returned to the conversation she had had with Snape. Or rather, the conversation he'd had with her. She hated him. Despised him. He had killed Dumbledore, but even so, he dared show up here and help her? Act as if he was one of the good guys. Harry had seen him kill Dumbledore, and surely, if he was on their side, he would never have done that.

Hermione sighed and punched her pillow into a more comfortable shape. But if Snape knew she was here, if he could so easily break into her house, why hadn't he acted more like a Death Eater? He hadn't tortured her, abducted her, or killed her. He'd treated her close to cordially. Cordially in the sense that he hadn't deducted any points from Gryffindor or given her a detention.

Again Hermione sighed and turned to lie on the other side, staring at the wall. There had been something else, though. Something in his eyes. If they hadn't been Snape's, she would have been tempted to call it desperation.

Biting her lip, Hermione sighed once more. Truth was that her frustration wasn't due to her former Potions professor. It was herself. He'd hardly barged into her room before she had told him too much. If he hadn't stopped her, she'd have told him about Harry and the wedding. She had been stupid. Did she really need to prove her intellect to her former professor to such a degree that she was willing to tell him everything she knew about Harry and the Order? Cursing herself, Hermione tossed in bed once more. Snape had said he would return. And Hermione dreaded it. Even though she did not want to admit it, she was at his mercy. He had proven that he could make her do anything without any real effort on his part.

Bastard, she thought, not really sure whom she meant.

Unable to find sleep, Hermione got up. If Snape had been right about Gamp's Elemental Law of Transfiguration (and she believed that to be very likely), she would never succeed in making her parents want to move to the States. Instead she'd suggest Australia, where her parents had honeymooned. And she might just as well cast the spell now while her parents were fast asleep.

* * * * *

The next day, Hermione was divided between dread and relief. Her parents had talked about nothing but their new wish to return to Australia, to the point where they considered moving there when Hermione had graduated from Hogwarts. But on the other hand, there was the business with Snape and his promised return.

The day went by at a tormentingly slow pace. Even though Hermione busied herself with improving her beaded bag, drawing up a prioritised inventory of what they might need, and making lists of what she had and what needed to be procured, her eyes strayed to the windows more frequently than they ought.

She didn't relish the thought of spending time with Snape. He wasn't what she considered pleasant company. But then again...hadn't she been hoping for some kind of recognition from him? Hadn't she been concentrating ferociously on Potions just to impress him? Surely, his visit could be seen as some kind of acknowledgement?

Hermione glanced at the window again. It was getting dark outside. But still there was no sign of black, swirling robes.

And why had he chosen her? If he intended to help with Harry's quest, he might as well just have found him. She was certain You-Know-Who knew the exact location of Harry's home, and if Snape had so easily been able to break into her home, why didn't he just find Harry and talk to him?

Hermione shook her head and concentrated on sorting her books in order of relevance. Arriving at *Hogwarts: A History*, she stopped. She'd read it several times, especially in her first year. But now? Would she return there? Wiping a hand across her eyes, she ignored the clench of her heart. Best not to think of those things. Determinedly, she put the book in the "perhaps" pile. Even though she'd done what she could, the beaded bag had its size limits.

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The house was empty, apart from herself. Her parents had left for a birthday party at her aunt's, but Hermione had faked a head-ache. She was pacing the floor, her hand on her wand, casting glances at the clock on the wall.

He had said he would come. Why didn't he just get it over with?

And then the doorbell rang. The tone was so shrill, Hermione was halfway through an *Expelliarmus* before she placed the sound. Her wand raised, she walked to the door, and looking out through the window next to it, recognised the billowing robes. He had returned.

She hesitated before opening the door. But she had known, from the moment he had announced he would return, that she would open it. Her curiosity got the better of her.

"Well?" Snape's face held no trace of his signature smirk. "Will you invite me in?"

Hermione opened the door wider.

"With words, Miss Granger," Snape almost sighed. "If I am to perform powerful magic in your house, an invitation would be appropriate."

"I'm not really sure I want you to perform powerful magic here."

"Well." The smirk had returned. "Since it is your parents' memory that is at stake, I don't particularly care about the outcome. You might."

Hermione glared at him. "Well, then. Come in, Professor Snape."

Inclining his head, Snape crossed the threshold. Hermione swallowed. There was no going back now.

Not really certain what to say, Hermione did what her parents had taught her proper hostesses do: "Tea?"

Snape merely nodded.

And so they returned to the kitchen. Hermione brewed tea (a whole pot this time) and Snape watched her. She poured two cups and sat down opposite her former potions professor.

For several moments they sat in utter silence.

"Well, then." Hermione cleared her throat. "Why are you here?"

"I do believe we covered that yesterday, Miss Granger," Snape replied. "Is your memory really that short-lived?"

"No." She took a sip of her tea. "I just don't understand why you are doing this."

Snape's eyes narrowed. "As long as you fear for your parents' safety, you will not be able to focus on helping Potter." He pinned her with his black eyes. "I believe Dumbledore left a very important task to him. And knowing Potter's inadequacy, he will most likely fall over his own feet if there is no one around to help him."

"So all this is because you want me to help Harry?"

"Potter does not concern me. His task does."

"I just don't understand..." Hermione's voice trailed off as she saw Snape's glare.

"What, pray tell me, is it you do not understand?" Snape hissed. "I want this over and done with as soon as possible, and as long as Potter isn't out there, doing what Dumbledore wanted him to do, the Dark Lord's power will increase."

"But..."

"But what, Miss Granger?"

"But you killed Dumbledore?" The words were out of Hermione's mouth before she could stop herself.

Instantly, Snape rose, loathing, disgust, and hatred etched into his every feature. He glared at her, teeth bared in a snarl, but he said nothing. He just glared. Hermione returned his stare evenly, though not unkindly. Because suddenly she realised what had happened.

"He asked you to, didn't he?" Her voice was quiet, calm. And devoid of any accusations.

Slowly, Snape's face relaxed. He sat down, his eyes still fixed on Hermione's. But they weren't cold any more. Just tired.

"The hand." Hermione stated. "I should have realised it earlier. I'm sorry."

Snape looked at his tea. "You have no reason to be."

"I think I do," she answered. "It can't be easy, what you are doing."

Snape's cold gaze pinned her again, his lips twisted into his cold snarl. "Ah, yes, of course the Gryffindor Know-It-All would know exactly what it is I do. And how it feels to watch innocent people suffer, when the only thing I can do to ease their pain is to ensure a quick death?"

Hermione winced. "No, sir." She tried hard to keep her voice even. "I don't. I just thought..."

"Don't!" Snape cut her off. For a moment contempt flickered in his eyes, but Hermione wasn't sure.

"Still," Hermione insisted, "you deserve our thanks."

Snape snorted. "Save your thanks for a better time, Miss Granger. There is plenty of suffering yet to endure. And nothing is decided yet. In the end everything you or I have done may be for naught."

"Intentions are important as well," Hermione said.

"Ah, yes, the greater good." Snape's voice was thick with contempt. "It is good to know that all the suffering is at least caused by *good intentions*."

Hermione swallowed and could not meet Snape's eyes.

They sat in silence a bit longer.

"You were right," Hermione said finally, "about Gamp's law."

"Of course," Snape replied.

Arrogant git! Hermione thought.

"You managed to change their dreams?"

"Yes. They want to move to Australia."

There was more silence.

"When their memory is altered, you will have to leave immediately." This time Snape broke the silence.

"I know."

"Are you prepared?"

"Yes." Hermione sighed. "Only... "

"What?"

"I realised I might not be returning to Hogwarts."

"Are you certain you wish to tell this to your headmaster, Miss Granger?" Snape's smirk was back. "You are studying for your N.E.W.T.s after all. The Ministry does not like it when students shirk their duties."

"But ...," He couldn't seriously be chastising her about *shirking*?

"Admitting that you plan on skipping school for an entire year is hardly wise."

"I... er... No, sir."

His voice was smug now. Could it be... "The Ministry is very strict on education."

... Humour? Was this Snape being *funny*?

"I was hoping you wouldn't tell them, sir."

"Indeed?" He paused. "Asking a Slytherin a favour is dangerous business, Miss Granger. But I think your comment may just slip my mind."

Hermione merely swallowed. Humour it might have been. But he was still Slytherin enough to make her owe him a debt. Another debt.

Again they sat in silence before they finally broached the subject of how her parents' memory should be altered.

She stiffened as she heard the key being turned in the lock. Exchanging a last glance with Snape, Hermione went into the hall.

"Hermione, dear." Her mother smiled a tired smile. "How are you feeling?"

"Better," Hermione replied, her voice barely more than a whisper.

"Is something the matter?" Her father looked at her with concern.

"It's just...," Hermione shook her head, forcing tears away. This was her last goodbye, her last precious moment with her parents. In a few moments they'd be Mr and Mrs Wilkins, with no recollection of her. And she would be alone, going off to fight a war against the mightiest dark wizard of the century.

Hermione looked at them, allowing her one last look, storing it as a treasured memory. "I'll miss you."

"Miss us?" her mother asked, with a confused smile. "But you've only just returned for holiday, dear."

"I know." Hermione hugged her mother first, then her father. "I was just afraid I might forget to say it."

Her parents looked at her nonplussed. She smiled at them one last time. "I'll go to bed," she said. And as she had taken a few steps up the stairs, she turned, wand in hand, and cast two body-binding spells.

"I'm sorry!" she croaked.

Hearing the door from the kitchen open, she turned around and fled up the stairs into her room. Angrily, she wiped away the tears that fell down her cheek. There was no time now.

After what seemed an eternity, the door opened slowly. In the reflection of the window she could see his black robes, swirling around his long frame.

"It is done." Snape's voice was quiet.

Hermione turned around, looking at him. His face was neutral, apart from something around his eyes. "How are they?"

"Perfectly fine." His voice was soft, hardly more than a whisper. And warm.

Hermione closed her eyes, biting her lip to stop her tears. This was not the time for crying. Composing herself, she opened her eyes.

"You must leave soon." And still his voice was soft, almost soothing.

Hermione raised her gaze, searching his eyes. And somewhere, hidden deep in the depth of the black orbs she saw understanding and pain. She nodded. And not knowing what made her do it, without thought or motive, she flung her arms around him.

And just as suddenly and quickly she took a step back. She met his gaze, her eyes determined, and any trace of despair or sadness gone. "Thank you!" she said, and turning on the spot she Apparated, her beaded bag in her hand.

Snape's face was unreadable as ever. But his eyes were fixed at the spot where she had been standing just seconds before. With a contemptuous sneer and a shake of his head, he too turned on the spot and Apparated, burying everything that had happened in a hidden and secluded part of his memory.