

Vows Cannot be Broken

by snapeophile

Serial drabble in response to "Married to Another" challenge. An Unbreakable Vow creates havoc in Hermione's relationship with Snape and her husband.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: This fic is in serial drabble form. It is a response to the "Married to Another" challenge issued at <http://community.livejournal.com/grangersnape100/>. Many thanks to my wonderful beta, JaneAverage!

Disclaimer: JKR owns all but my ideas. I am not profiting in any way from this piece of fiction.

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Once again, Hermione felt the unmistakable *frisson* down her spine that announced the unseen presence of Severus Snape. As he had done so many times in class, he soundlessly appeared behind her, the hem of his swirling robes caressing her legs as he peered into her cauldron, assessing, judging, silent.

Hermione could feel his breath...warm, sweetened with wintergreen...playing on her earlobe, teasing the tendrils which had escaped her bun.

With a slight smirk, he purred his findings: "Adequate, *Mrs. Weasley*. Just." Emphasis, as always, on her title...despite her continual protestations that she had kept her maiden name.

Ron was horribly insensitive when they discussed her leaving the Ministry to find another job...any job...as long as it was far away from Severus Snape.

"Hermione, finances and all. I'm not up to joining the fray, just yet . . ."

You haven't been "up to the fray" *in over a year now*, she couldn't help thinking; but stopped herself, ashamed of her cruelty. Ron still hadn't discussed what happened with Harry that day. Voldemort was dead, Harry was dead, and Ron had been in the middle of it all.

Marrying him was the least she could do.

The following week was the worst. The staring. The insinuations. She felt his eyes on her whenever she walked from her lab station to the store room. He practically shadowed her through the lab. Her stolen glances were rewarded with a direct stare and half-smirk. All day long, he watched her. She debated filing harassment charges, but knew that option was closed to her, now.

Her life was no longer her own. There was Ron to think about . . .

Disgusted, rattled, Hermione dropped a phial of experimental potion. The glass shattered.

"Do try not to sabotage my experiments, *Mrs. Weasley*."

His comment pushed her over the edge. She would handle him bringing their personal issues into work, but how dare he question her professionalism?

"Severus Snape, you infuriating *bastard*! How dare you..."

In response, he swooped across the lab, grabbed her by her shoulders, and stilled her question with a searing and deep kiss. Hermione struggled at first, but gave in to him . . . to them.

He ended the kiss and pulled her close, sheltering her, as her tears came.

"Hermione. Thank goodness. Finally, a reaction. You're coming out of the emotional stupor you've been in since you married Weasley."

Hermione cried away her grief at losing Harry and so many others. She cried away the ending of her relationship with Severus. She cried away her disappointment at how her life had turned out. Mostly, she cried for Ron, who was now more emotionally closed than Severus Snape had ever been. Then a renewed torrent of tears fell as she thought about the Vow.

Severus held her, comforted her throughout. He gently dried her face with a handkerchief and laid a butterfly kiss on each of her swollen, red eyes.

"Hermione, you know you cannot go back to him."

"We belong together. We overcame so much to be together. No one has ever loved me as you have . . ." Severus ended there, overwhelmed by his admission.

Hermione smiled softly as she looked into the eyes of the only man she had ever truly loved. Her mind reeled as she searched for the right explanation, the one that would allow him to remain intact and able to love again.

"Severus, you remember the final weeks of the war. We were totally out of contact; I didn't know if you were alive."

"Yes."

"Ron found out about us. He told Harry."

"Continue." Snape had suspected Potter's involvement in the dissolution of their relationship.

"You know how they reacted. Rage, disbelief, disgust. They wouldn't listen to me when I tried to explain . . ."

"Of course not. Potter's admirable self-control and disciplined decision-making are legendary."

"Don't speak that way about the de...Harry," Hermione chided.

"Forgive me."

"The last few weeks were intense. The three of us together versus Voldemort. In the face of death we became closer than ever before. Harry had a premonition about the end . . . he saw Ron surviving, himself not."

"Severus, I made an Unbreakable Vow."

Hermione paused, waiting for his anger to explode over them like a cloudburst.

But there was no anger; only a deepening of his facial lines, a deadening of his eyes.

"You know I have intimate knowledge of Unbreakable Vows, Hermione. I'll leave you in peace to deal with your *obligations*."

"That's *it*? After what we've shared?"

"Rich of you to berate me, woman, when you're the one who severed us in two with your Vow."

Time stopped as their souls entwined through their eyes, for the last time.

Neither heard the soft *pop* as Ron's head disappeared through the Floo.

Disconsolate, Hermione walked the streets of Muggle London, oblivious to the stares she was receiving as she cried her way through the city. After an hour of self-pity and recrimination, she decided she had had enough.

"Hermione Jane Granger, get a grip on yourself!" she whispered fiercely.

"You promised Harry that you'd take care of Ron. That's your reality; now go make it better for both of you!"

She ducked into a dark alley and Disapparated home, determined to do whatever it took to make her marriage work, to help Ron heal, and to overcome her feelings for Severus Snape.

Ron was having the best day he'd had in months. He was up before ten o'clock, showered, shaved, and wearing clean clothes...activities he usually didn't accomplish before mid-afternoon. He felt so good that he decided to venture into the Ministry and take Hermione to lunch.

He was devastated by their conversation. Hermione had been the bright spot in his life; thoughts of her had kept him going, trying to defeat the depression and post-traumatic stress he'd experienced since the battle.

He returned to their home and rummaged around her private lab. He felt strangely at peace with his decision.

Hours after her confrontation with Snape, Hermione returned to the Burrow. She felt a tinge of sadness each day when she remembered that Molly and Arthur were not there; it was just she and Ron and the occasional visiting sibling.

"Ron! I'm home! I'm sorry to be late. I ran into an old friend...Oh, sweet Circe, what have you done?" Hermione shouted, instinctively checking for vital signs with her wand. Ron appeared to be sleeping peacefully, stretched out on the couch, wearing a Quidditch jersey and Harry's old Gryffindor scarf. An empty phial had fallen from his slack hand.

"Oh, my God, Ron, why? Why?" Hermione wailed, as she smoothed his hair off his brow, kissing his now-cold cheek. As if in reply, Harry's old owl, Hedwig, now theirs, swooped down and perched on the back of the couch. A parchment was tied to her leg. She hooted sadly, fluffing her wings, never taking her beady eyes off Ron.

Trembling, sobbing, choking for air, Hermione untied the parchment. She thought she knew what it would say...Ron had found out about the Vow...so her blood ran cold in her veins as she started to read Ron's parting message.

Dearest Hermione,

Nothing you've done had anything to do with my actions today. You've taken care of me and loved me beyond what any rational man could expect. You've certainly far exceeded your promises to Harry.

Hermione gasped. He knew all along . . .

I want you to be happy, to marry again, to have the children you so dearly want. I'm sorry, I could never allow myself to perpetuate the blood that runs through my veins. But a child of yours would be a gift to the world.

Hermione dropped the parchment, shoulders heaving, body wracked with sobs.

"How could Ron have felt this badly about himself and I didn't know?" she cried, surprise and shame intensifying her grief. She keened, moaning and calling out his name, for some time before she was able to calm herself and read Ron's letter again.

Hermione, I can't go on with the knowledge of what I've done. Thoughts of the final battle haunt me day and night. It's time you knew the truth.

I killed our best friend, Harry.

Hermione screamed and fainted, falling onto Ron's deathly still corpse.

It was dawn before her overtaxed mind would allow her to wake.

All night he had stalked through the village of Hogsmeade, black robes billowing out behind him. The set of his mouth and fierceness in his eyes told all to stay away. He was raging with himself, trying vainly to rid himself of his love for Hermione. Not for some noble, self-effacing cause, but for the reasons of the Vow, which he understood like none other. His presence in her life would threaten her existence; nothing but death could come from their love.

He needed to make her understand this. He would remove himself from temptation. He Apparated to the Burrow.

His heart stopped beating for a second when he saw the awful tableau, and feelings like he'd had that night on the Astronomy Tower reeled through his core. Hermione slumped, lifeless, on top of an obviously dead Weasley. The phial on the floor told all.

"NO! NO! Hermione! Don't be gone!" Severus shouted, running to them.

His heart leapt when he grabbed Hermione, pulling her up and shaking her roughly. Warmth. She was warm. Relief coursed through his veins as he clutched her to him, sobbing, murmuring her name.

"Severus?" she asked weakly.

"Yes, dearest, I am here."

"Ron's dead."

He had forgotten about Weasley. One touch confirmed Hermione's diagnosis. Snape reached down and retrieved the phial. His well-schooled Potions master nose identified a crudely mixed solution of hellebore, monkshood, belladonna and soporous.

"Darling, he died quickly and painlessly, if that's any consolation to you."

A sob escaped Hermione's lips in response. She picked up the parchment once more and began to hesitantly read aloud.

Voldemort's final curse before dying paralyzed and disfigured Harry. He was in unbearable pain. He begged me to put him out of his misery. We both knew he wouldn't recover from a curse like that.

So I did it, Hermione. I hugged him, and said goodbye. I summoned up all my hatred of Voldemort and used the Killing Curse on my best friend. So you see, I have to go. I've stayed for your sake, but realize now that I cause you more pain than I am able to preclude. I wish you and Severus great happiness.

Love,

Ronald

Hermione fell back into Severus' arms, limp with grief.

"Damn fool Gryffindor," Severus growled. "It was no more than I did for Albus. Weasley should have found a way to stay alive for you. I did."