

Closure

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Companion piece to "Traitor." If you sell your soul for freedom, what would you willingly give for redemption?

The Very End

Chapter 1 of 1

Companion piece to "Traitor." If you sell your soul for freedom, what would you willingly give for redemption?

AN: A very large thank you to Southern who betaed this. Any and all mistakes are my own, though.

If you haven't read "Traitor" and are up to a seriously brutal story, it would be best to read that first as this piece will give away the crucial points of that one. If you don't intend to read "Traitor," then I hope this stands on its own, though, of course it might be a little confusing.

I will say that this is not the brutal story "Traitor" was.

Oh, and I also did an illustration for this piece. You can find it at: www.deviantart.com/deviation/57655960/ but please read the story first. :-)

It took five years, but I was the one to find him. He put up a decent fight, but I think I was more determined than him.

Snape heard his wand fall to the floor and would have cursed had he been able to. He had underestimated Weasley, and now he was going to die.

Weasley approached slowly and cautiously, and Snape had to admit the boy had grown some sense, until he felt the Body Bind Hex fall away. Granted, there wasn't much he could do with the cords binding him and without his wand, but he thought his reputation would make Weasley more cautious.

Of course, it was curious that he was still alive. He had expected Weasley to finish him off well before now.

Suddenly, his body lifted off the floor, and he found himself positioned in a chair. Looking up to see Weasley's grim face, he suddenly felt a tingle of fear. If he remembered correctly, Weasley had fancied Hermione around the time she'd been captured. He had hoped to avoid any more torture. He hoped he could still provoke the boy.

"Well, well, well," he said, curling his lip into his most derisive sneer. "If it isn't Boy Wonder's sidekick. Come to kill me, have you? Or do you just want to torture me for the fun of it? It's a good way to release all that pent up... frustration."

Weasley sneered back and raised his wand. Snape steeled himself not to flinch but was surprised when Weasley only conjured a chair for himself.

Sitting down, Weasley never took his eyes off of Snape, but the sneer faded into something that, on someone else, would have been thoughtful.

"No. There's been enough of that already, don't you think?" His hard eyes belied his cool manner. He was obviously very angry.

Snape's sneer intensified. "Ah, acting the noble Gryffindor, are you? I'm sure if Albus could see you, he'd be very proud."

That got a reaction, though it wasn't the one expected.

Weasley smiled and relaxed into his chair. A touch of smugness pulling at his lips. "Yes, I expect he would be. Question is, what would he think of you?"

Only years of discipline kept Snape from raging at the boy. After a few seconds, however, he spit out, "I never deigned to guess what the old fool was thinking."

Weasley had the impertinence to smile. Snape decided to up the ante.

"So, you aren't going to kill me, then?"

"Nope."

"Not even after what I did to your little girlfriend?"

Ron's smile hardened, but if anything, he seemed satisfied.

"Ah, see, that's one of the reasons I'm not going to kill you. I feel obliged to thank you for letting Hermione go."

Snape stilled in surprise. "Whatever makes you think I 'let her go'?"

Weasley just shook his head and smiled. "She told us the basics, Snape. She might have come up with the plan to escape, but you're smart; you would have seen through it. You wouldn't have let her go if it hadn't been what you wanted to do."

Snape raised an amused eyebrow. "Don't you think you might be assuming a bit much?"

Ron shook his head. "No, I don't think so." He paused a moment. "You helped us win the war. I know you could well have been just resuming the double agent role for Voldemort, but the information you gave us did help. I don't doubt you treated Hermione as badly as she said you did, but I'm sure it could have been worse. You could have tortured and raped her every night and made her your slave if you'd so wanted, but you didn't. You did just enough to scare her."

Snape chuckled darkly, a bitter memory forcing itself upon him. "Ah, yes. *Crucio* is good for scaring people."

"Feel guilty about that, do you?"

Snape looked at Weasley, really looked at him, for the first time. He didn't say anything, though.

Weasley seemed to sense Snape's withdrawal and made himself more comfortable.

"No, Snape, I'm not going to kill you, hex you or anything so unsatisfying as that. I'm going to interrogate you. And, after I've got all the information I want, I'm going to take you to Azkaban where you'll await your trial. And you're right, that will be fun to watch. I'm sure it *will* be a fabulous release of all that pent up... frustration."

Snape narrowed his eyes at the man before him, but felt his respect for him rising. "Do you really think you'll be able to get any information from me?"

Ron smiled deviously. "Yes, Professor. I think I will."

That was unpleasant. I actually feel sorry for the bastard. If it weren't for Hermione...

Snape sat in his cell, dreading the upcoming interview. He didn't know how Weasley had become such an accomplished interrogator, but he was impressed, and ashamed, at how much information Weasley had gleaned. He was also impressed with how devious and clever the boy had become. He never would have thought Ronald Weasley would be able to figure out how to punish him so thoroughly. But he had.

And now he had to face that punishment.

He heard the doors at the end of the corridor clang open and tensed. They were here. Their progress was slow and quiet, and that did nothing but intensify the dread he was feeling. Finally, there they were in front of the cell.

Weasley had his arm around Hermione in a supportive gesture. She was standing tall, looking more dignified than he had ever seen her, but she was resolutely not looking at him.

Weasley whispered something to her, and she nodded her head reluctantly before he stepped away, shooting him a meaningful, and threatening, look. Hermione watched him go, and as soon as the door at the end of the corridor clanged shut, she let out a sigh and turned to face him.

He had expected hate, rage, loathing, tears... any or all of the above. He hadn't really expected indifference.

She didn't say anything, but just stood there, arms crossed, looking at him as if he were a piece of furniture. A boring piece of furniture at that.

He knew this game very well, and usually could beat anyone at it, but with her it was different. He could still remember those eyes looking up at him defiantly or glaring at him in indignant fury. He could remember those eyes avoiding his as he forced her to humiliate herself. He could still remember those eyes pleading with him for release. And he had never been able to forget the look of utter betrayal she'd given him after he'd used *Crucio* on her.

Indifference was the one thing he couldn't take. He knew how much that look hid and how much it hurt to hide.

"Are you going to stand there all day staring at me, Miss Granger? Perhaps you want revenge for all the indignities I put you through? If that's the case, I'm sure I could force myself to empty my bladder right now. Or perhaps I could strip for you? Oh, but I seem to recall you enjoying that toward the end."

Her mouth tightened slightly, but otherwise, she remained impassive. He was surprised how much that hurt him.

He leaned back against the cold stone wall and sighed, running his hand roughly through his hair. He took several moments to compose his roiling emotions again and then looked at her.

"I hear congratulations are in order. Mr. Weasley tells me that you've agreed to be his wife."

Her mouth tightened again, but she offered a slight nod.

"He is quite possibly worthy of you now."

He was surprised when her face twisted in anger at what was supposed to be a benign compliment.

"Don't you dare denigrate Ronald Weasley, Snape! Don't you dare!"

"Denigrate?" Snape said, truly confused.

Hermione didn't say anything, though. She just turned and stared down the hallway with a stormy expression.

"Do you love Mr. Weasley?"

She looked at him as if he were a dunderhead. "Of course I love Ronald!"

"How long have you loved him?"

"That's none of your business."

"Why haven't you married him yet?"

She was looking like she wanted to murder him now, and he drew in a breath of relief. "Hermione..."

"*Do not call me Hermione!*" she hissed, suddenly at his cell gate. "You do not have the right to call me by my first name ever again!"

He drew in a breath at her pained expression and wondered yet again if it had been the right thing to do.

"Can you forgive me?" he whispered, still trying to control his emotions.

She let out a bitter bark of laughter and backed away from his cell, crossing her arms against her chest defensively.

"There's nothing to forgive!" she said in a voice straining to be playful and carefree. "After all, you were just doing what needed to be done, and I was doing what needed to be done, and Peter..." Her careless facade crumbled for a moment, and she blinked rapidly.

"Peter did what he needed to do when he got you out," he said softly.

She shook her head, biting her lip to keep from crying. "No."

Snape scoffed. "He did what he felt needed to be done. He loved you to the end, you know."

"Stop it," he heard her whisper as she shook her head more forcefully, and backed away further, raising her hands to cover her mouth.

He stood up and walked to the cell gate, putting his hands on the bars, wishing that he could reach out and comfort her.

"He died bravely, trying to protect you, even in the face of Voldemort's fury."

Her eyes screamed at him in her own fury, even as they grew wide in fear. Her head still shaking slightly, she turned to flee down the hall. Before she'd gone four paces, he called out, "It wasn't your fault."

She stopped, like he'd hoped she would, and slowly turned around.

Chest heaving with emotion, she came up to his cell and faced him. Her expression was hard and full of hatred, though he guessed that most of it was not directed at him.

"How can you say it wasn't my fault?" she asked in a shaking voice. "How can you say that?"

"Because it wasn't." Snape reached out through the bars toward her, though he stopped when she flinched. Replacing his hand on the bar, he added, "It was as much my fault as it was yours."

When she scoffed and turned away, his hand reached out before he could stop himself, grabbing her wrist. When she looked down at his hand, he immediately let go.

"It was also Wormtail's own fault." She bristled visibly and he continued. "I saw what you had planned. It was a good plan, but..." He sighed. "It doesn't help knowing it was for the greater good, though, does it?"

"How can it?" she cried. "I led a good man to his death!"

"Herm...He was only a good man after he started loving you. Before that he was *Wormtail*. He was a rat and a vicious one to boot. You helped him become a man."

"And promptly killed him off!"

"You did NOT KILL HIM!!!" Snape roared, his patience worn through. "He was going to die anyway, and you made him strong enough to die bravely. Does that count for nothing?"

Hermione looked at the floor, and Snape guessed by her shaking body that she was crying. Once again, without thinking about it, he reached out to her, stroking her cheek gently.

He was surprised when she nuzzled into his hand for a moment before she caught herself and jerked away as if stung. She looked up at him, and he could see her eyes harden against him before she asked, "Were you the one to kill him?"

He swallowed and nodded. "Although by the time I cast the curse, it was more of a mercy than not."

A pained expression crossed her face, and she looked away. "Torture?"

"Yes."

She nodded in acceptance, though she was looking down and biting her lip again.

"Why did you do it?"

Snape sighed. "To stay in the Dark Lord's good graces."

"I don't mean why you killed Peter..."

"*All of it* was to stay in his good graces, Her...Miss Granger. *All of it*. That's why it was as much my fault as it was yours... and Peter's."

"Was Voldemort watching?" Hermione asked, horror-struck.

He hastily shook his head. "Not in that way, although of course he took every opportunity to glean updates from our minds."

Hermione shuddered.

"I say again, your plan was good. I hadn't come up with a better option at that time, so I... I smoothed the path out whenever I could."

She laughed bitterly. "So you weren't humiliating and abusing me; you were *helping* me," she said, her voice dripping in sarcasm.

"Your plans were good, but you have never mastered the art of acting. If you had felt even slightly comfortable around me, Peter would have seen through your attentions."

She looked down the corridor again, clenching her jaw repeatedly. She had become much better at masking her thoughts and emotions, but it was still obvious that she was raging on the inside.

"And the Crucio?" she asked calmly, looking over at him again.

Snape looked down at the floor, unable to face her, even with all the time to prepare. "It was the only way I could think of to rectify my mistake."

"Of sleeping with me?" she asked harshly.

He looked back up at her. "Yes." Her mouth shrank to nothing, and her eyes hardened into flint; he wished she knew the truth of the matter. "It was a mistake; you can't deny that."

She shook her head slightly, but he wasn't sure what she meant by it.

"I took advantage of you, knowingly. I showed you how... I was tender when I should have been brutal."

"Oh, so if you had just raped me, then there would have been no need for the Crucio?" Hermione asked mockingly.

"I would never... I couldn't... I shouldn't have touched you in the first place. I shouldn't have watched you with Peter that day. I shouldn't have... I couldn't think of another way to turn you against me."

She laughed, but it was hollow.

"I got pregnant, you know."

Snape looked at her sharply, eyes flicking from her face to her belly and back again. "Did you..."

"I terminated it."

Snape's face went taut and pale, but he nodded his head in understanding.

"You knew, didn't you," he asked slowly, "that that first healing potion contained a contraceptive?"

Hermione shrugged and answered, "I knew it was yours. Peter always gave me a contraceptive afterwards."

Snape closed his eyes and hung his head. "I'm sorry I put you through that, but why tell me now?"

Hermione's lip curled up in a mockery of a smile before she shrugged, and her face relaxed into its previous sadness. "I didn't think it was fair that I was the only one who had to deal with the consequences. It may be a little vengeful of me, but... but can you blame me?"

Snape let out a sad, breathy chuckle and shook his head. They stood there silently for a few moments before Snape cleared his throat and asked, "Did I make you hate me that much?"

Hermione's face grew taut again, but she didn't look away from him. "No. I never hated you. I feared you, but..."

Even though she couldn't see him, Snape nodded his understanding before leaning his forehead against the cold metal bars. She followed suit, placing her forehead parallel to his lips. He sighed and noticed she shivered.

"I should go," she said after a minute of silent communion. Snape noticed she hadn't lifted her head.

"You're not to blame."

"Yes, I am."

"You only did what you had to do."

"I betrayed him. I betrayed my friends. I betrayed *myself*."

"Don't hate yourself for it."

She looked up at him. "I *failed*."

He raised his head and smiled at her sadly. "I remember you saying that night that you wanted to know if I could ever be pleased with you and wondering what you'd have to sacrifice in order to do so. I hope to hell that you don't feel that way for me anymore, but do you feel so for Mr. Weasley?"

Hermione looked stricken, but answered, "It's different."

"Of course it's different. It is hopefully a healthy relationship, but my question is, would you make a personal sacrifice for his happiness?"

"Of course I would."

Snape paused, steadying his nerves.

"To make Mr. Weasley happy, you're going to have to sacrifice the self-hatred. He'll never be happy until you forgive yourself, dear heart."

He raised his hands and gently cupped her face, stroking away the tear tracks with his thumbs. "Go. Get married. Be happy. Love your husband and the family you'll create. Live."

He guided her face toward the bars and managed to place a delicate, chaste kiss on her lips, then whispered, "Peter sacrificed himself for you. It was his gift to you, no matter how he came to think of it. Don't throw it away. Don't be like me."

She lowered her head to the bars again, but covered his hands with hers.

"Now go. Make Ronald Weasley a better man."

She released his hands, which fell to the cross bar and laid there helplessly. She nodded and wiped her face. She then looked at him one last time.

"I forgive you."

He said nothing until she reached the gate at the end of the corridor. When she didn't look back as she crossed to the other side, he whispered, "Good-bye, Hermione."

Snape was Kissed today. I was there and saw him calmly raise his head up to the Dementor, willingly offering up his soul.

I wonder what he said to Hermione. I doubt she'll ever tell me, but I know that I have him to thank for my wife being here body, heart and soul.

I have him to thank for the closure.