

Second Chances

by cormak

Deathly Hallows Book Seven Spoilers! When Hermione Granger's life takes a turn for the worse, she learns from the most unlikely source that second chances can make you whole again.

When it All Comes Tumbling Down

Chapter 1 of 2

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Hermione ran hard and fast. The rain stung her eyes and soaked her to the bone, but still she went on.

She had no idea where she was going; she just kept running. One foot in front of the other, splashing through the murky puddles. The tears were clouding her vision; her heart hammered so hard it hurt, and her harsh breathing made her lungs ache. She stumbled, banging into something metal, and blinked to find herself leaning against a familiar wrought iron fence. She opened the gate, rushed inside and finally collapsed onto the ground a few yards inside.

It was silent except for the storm, which raged around her. Of course it would be silent in a graveyard.

Hermione buried her face in her hands, shaking hard as she cried. Her tears mixed with the rain, washing down the sides of her hands.

It was over... all over. Twenty years of marriage to Ronald Weasley was now a memory laced with more hurt than good. Over the years, their once harmless nagging grew severe. It hit a high point when their children started school at Hogwarts and they were alone together in the house.

They pretended that things were fine when the children visited on holidays, but the arguing grew worse. Ron wanted one thing and Hermione wanted something different. When looking back at their lives together, it had always been that way.

It was finally decided this evening that the marriage should end when Ron angrily called her a Mudblood who wanted to put more energy into books and a future career than in her family. He had been shocked that the hurtful term had left his lips. He immediately apologized, but Hermione had had enough.

Rose and Hugo would be devastated when they learned their parents would be splitting up, although Hermione suspected Rose had a feeling something was going on. Her daughter always seemed to be observing her parents when she was home visiting for holidays, most likely waiting for them to slip up and cease to act in front of her.

Her poor children. They would have to go from home to home to see their parents. And where would Hermione live? The house had been a gift from George after the war when he learned Ron and Hermione were getting married. It wouldn't be right. She couldn't go back to that house. She would rather sleep out here with the gravestones. At least they wouldn't yell at her and call her a selfish Mudblood.

She heard the sound of one of the gates opening, some distance away and got to her feet, wavering unsteadily. She could not bear to face anyone right now, whether she knew him or her or not.

So, she began to run again as fast as her feet would carry her. She was so busy trying to get away; she didn't see the dark-robed figure move from behind a gravestone

about to place yellow roses on the earth before it.

She ran straight into the person, the roses flying through the air, the petals falling like yellow rain.

"Why can't you watch where the hell you're going?" a low, angry voice snarled.

Strong hands steadied and then shook her.

Hermione could see the bruised petals and destroyed flowers, and she felt even more miserable. A fresh round of sobs escaped her.

Without a sound, one of the steady hands released her arm and tilted up her chin.

Hermione found herself staring into the surprised dark eyes of Severus Snape.

To be continued....

Return to the Living

Chapter 2 of 2

Deathly Hallows Book Seven Spoilers! When Hermione Granger's life takes a turn for the worse, she learns from the most unlikely source that second chances can make you whole again.

Thank you to those who took time to read and review the first chapter. It's been a while since I've written much of anything. After reading Deathly Hallows, I knew I needed to write.

Hermione gasped, her eyes wide. She shook her head in disbelief. Some of her damp hair swung back to smack her in the cheek.

Severus Snape looked equally surprised and a little unsure of what to do.

Hermione stumbled backwards in shock, causing Snape to release his hold on her. She tripped over one of the gravestones and fell to the ground, hitting her head hard on one of the flat stone markers. Then there was darkness.

Hermione felt something cool and damp being pressed to her forehead. Her eyelids fluttered open, and her vision swam in front of her. Her head hurt badly, as if someone had hit her with a hammer. She squeezed her eyes shut.

"Drink this. It will help with the pain."

In her hazy state, she did not protest the familiar voice and accepted the disgusting liquid that burned as it went down her throat. Several moments later, the throbbing pain in her head disappeared, and when she opened her eyes, her vision was clear.

She was sitting on a threadbare dark green couch, was completely dry, and kneeling in front of her was none other than Severus Snape.

Hermione paled as if she was seeing a ghost, and Severus realized to her that would almost be true.

"B...b...but, you're dead! I must have hit my head... I must be hallucinating...."

"You did hit your head, but I assure you Miss G- Mrs. Weasley," he corrected himself. "I am quite alive."

Snape almost had not recognized her in the graveyard. Her bushy hair had been drenched and straight, and twenty years had changed her. She was taller, nearly as tall as him and was not the skinny little girl he once knew her to be. He had needed to see her face to know who she was.

Hermione squeezed her eyes shut at how Snape addressed her. Memories of earlier in the evening danced in her mind until Snape spoke again.

"Are you well? The potion should have helped you, and I healed the wound on the back of your head. Perhaps you are injured more than I originally thought. You always did have an attention-seeking streak in you." The last part was a little softer and slightly bitter sounding.

"I'm fine, thank you," she spat out a little more harshly than she meant.

"Winky, some tea and biscuits if you would be so kind."

"Yes, Mr. Snape. Winky is happy to..."

The house-elf stopped in her tracks. Her eyes grew wide at the sight of Hermione in the house. Then the elf was gone, in the direction of what Hermione assumed was the kitchen.

"Please forgive her surprise. I don't normally have company. In fact, I never have company."

Hermione nodded, but half wondered if Winky's surprise was because of her organization of S.P.E.W. so long ago.

Snape watched as Hermione took in her surroundings. His living room was clean these days since he had taken up residence here. Winky always insisted on dusting and cleaning the whole house several times a week. He had enough books on his nearly wall to wall shelves to rival the library at Hogwarts. He watched as she greedily took in their presence.

"Is this your house?"

"Indeed. Welcome to number seventeen, Spinner's End."

"Are all of these books yours?"

Severus held back the chuckle that nearly escaped. Apparently she was still a bookworm after all these years. "Many of them belonged to my mother, but a good number of them are mine."

Severus allowed her a few more moments to take in her environment before he spoke. "Now, would you care to tell me why you were running through the graveyard in the pouring rain as if a Dementor were at your heels?"

Her eyes locked with his. "If you would care to tell me how you can be alive." For the first time that evening she left her own worries behind. "Harry saw you die twenty years ago. He saw Nagini strike you. Saw the life drain from your eyes. I saw your body on the floor in the Shrieking Shack...."

"Ah, yes. Mr. Potter also saw me kill Albus Dumbledore, too. Didn't he?"

Hermione bit her lip. He had a point there.

"Tell me, Mrs. Weasley..."

"DON'T!" Hermione barked, and Snape's brows raised over his eyes at her sudden tone. "Please," she tried again a bit more softly. "Please don't address me as such. Miss Granger would be preferable or Hermione would be just fine."

Snape looked down to her hands and realized there was no wedding band. He was puzzled. There had been nothing in the *Prophet* about her getting a divorce from Ronald Weasley.

"Very well, Miss Granger."

Hermione was suddenly brought back to her Hogwarts years.

"I'm sorry... I didn't mean to yell at you. I..."

"You are no doubt overwhelmed."

"Yes, I dare say I am. I hardly expected to run into you... ever."

He smiled and Hermione realized it was not a smirk or an evil smile that he would have flashed after saying something particularly nasty to one of her fellow Gryffindors in their school years. It was a genuine smile.

"I hardly expected to run into you, Miss Granger. No one ever visits the graveyard on stormy evenings, and that is how I prefer it."

"Why were you..." She answered her own question. He was visiting Harry's mother's grave. That had to be it. It had been revealed that he had been in love with her since they were both children. Apparently, he still carried a torch after all these years.

"I'm so sorry about the flowers..."

He quieted her with a raised hand. The sound of rattling teacups filled the air signaling Winky's return. She brought them each a steaming cup of tea. Snape took his and sipped it as he sat across from Hermione in a worn blue wingback chair. Winky set a plate of biscuits on a low table centered between the couch and chair and disappeared in silence.

Twenty years had passed since Hermione had last seen Severus Snape. He had to be around fifty-seven or fifty-eight years old now. The very slightest bits of silver hair were starting to show in his dark locks. He still kept his hair cut to just above his shoulders. He dressed in black in the same style buttoned-up coat and black trousers he wore as a professor. The only difference was that he wore no teaching robes.

Hermione watched as he set his teacup and saucer on the table. She thought he looked younger now than he had at thirty-seven. No doubt the absence of so many burdens and secrets to carry had done wonders for him. These last twenty years must have also been lonely.

Snape's dark eyes met hers, and she looked away, busying herself with sipping her tea. What did one say to the man everyone thought had been dead for two decades? She had never spoken one on one to Severus Snape. He always brushed her off in school, ignoring her desire to impress and please him academically.

"It seems we both have many questions."

She nodded, refusing eye contact.

"Did no one ever wonder why there was no body to bury?"

She lifted her eyes to his at that. "Of course we did! But everyone assumed Nagini, that she...."

"Finished my remains?"

"That is a polite way of phrasing it."

"How could she have when she and Voldemort left me to die on the floor like a worthless animal?"

Hermione's eyes widened. He had called Voldemort by his name and not the Dark Lord.

Guilt assaulted her, and suddenly, she felt nauseous. She and Harry had also left him there, thinking he was dead.

"My god, Severus, why didn't you let someone know you were alive? Why didn't you..." She silenced herself and took a deep breath. "You don't know how Harry has tortured himself over the years because he never got to apologize for acting like a prat to you or to thank you."

She was so lost in her swirling thoughts that she did not realize she had called him by his first name. After the war, they were all resolved to call him Severus or Professor Snape and never Snape again. It somehow seemed disrespectful after all he had done.

Severus did not know this and found it odd to hear his name roll off her tongue instead of 'Professor Snape'. He had half expected her to call him that.

Severus frowned as he took in the rest of what she had said. It always had to be about Potter. Even after all these years.

"You must understand that I did not expect to live," he spat out harshly.

Severus got to his feet and began to pace, the old floorboards creaking beneath him. "After Nagini bit me, *wanted* to die. I didn't even fight it after I gave Potter my memories. As far as I was concerned, my time was over and done."

He crossed his arms over his chest, clearly upset. "But Dumbledore thought of everything and wouldn't just let me slip away. He sent Fawkes, and his tears helped remove the venom in my veins. Dumbledore sent Winky, and she brought me home and cared for me, giving me anti-venom and blood replenishing potions. I was very ill for weeks, but as you can see I survived."

He stopped in front of one of the bookshelves, letting his long fingers trail over a few of the titles. "As time continued to pass... I could not bring myself to venture in public or present myself to anyone."

He gazed out a nearby window, watching the rain strike the panes of glass. "I read the articles they wrote about me. While some forgave me, many did not and rightly so after how I treated people."

He turned to face the witch on his couch. "I have also read the details of your life, Mr. Weasley and Mr. Potter and his wife. I have wreaked enough havoc in all of your lives. I did not want to upset the balance, which my presence might have done. It was better for me to stay silent and for you all to remain oblivious to the truth."

"You're wrong. Harry forgives you. You don't know how he blames himself for not saving you. For not knowing in the Shrieking Shack what he learned later!" She was on her feet and appeared almost angry with him. "We all forgive you!"

There were tears in her eyes, and Severus wondered if he should have Disapparated after she ran into him in the graveyard. He had no doubt that he not only just complicated her life, but everyone's.

"I did not mean to upset you. Sit and sip your tea or eat a biscuit. I want to know what had you out in the rain."

The energy seemed to drain out of her at his request. She sank back onto the couch, but did not reach for her tea or a biscuit.

"Ron and I are getting a divorce," she said plainly.

Severus said nothing. While he understood why they married, he never agreed with it.

"We started bickering... more than usual. The children just went back to school. We always try not to bicker in front of them." She looked down and reached for a chunk of her long hair, nervously rolling it in between her fingers. It was less bushy due to the length. At thirty-seven, when most witches kept their hair short, Hermione allowed hers to grow long. Another thing Ron hated.

She looked down at the deep scratches on the old wood floor, willing the tears to go away, but they came anyway, slipping down her cheeks. "Now that the children are grown and in school, I thought I could focus a little on me. Ron always had his job and it was time for me to have mine. As much as I love my children, motherhood wasn't my first choice. I've always wanted a career." She released her hair and looked over to Severus who was listening intently.

"I have an interview on Monday for a job. I was so excited, but Ron became furious when I told him." She sniffed. A tear rolled down her nose and dripped, falling onto her beige corduroy pants.

"He hates how I've retained some of my "Muggle" ways and thinking. He thinks I shouldn't work. He says it makes me different when I dive into too many books or want to research."

Severus sneered. "He wants to form you into the shape he desires and not allow you to be yourself."

"Exactly!" Hermione cried out. Severus Snape understood, why couldn't Ron?

"He called me a rather derogatory term and it exploded after that. I threw my ring at him and he told me to leave his house and I told him I never wanted to see him again." She was crying more openly now, the tears falling one after another. "The problem is that I don't want to see him for a long time. I don't want to be married to him anymore," she admitted honestly. "He was actually drawing up the divorce papers while I was there... that made me flee." She wiped her eyes with the back of her hand. "I think I'm crying more because of how things used to be and how the children are going to react." A fresh round of sobs came forth when she thought of her children.

Severus sat completely still. Fury was brewing in his obsidian eyes. He could almost picture the fight. Probably something similar to how his own parents used to quarrel. What upset him the most was her mentioning that Ronald Weasley had called her a derogatory term. It could have been any word, but Severus would have bet his life that Weasley had called her a Mudblood.

Hermione was weeping with her face in her hands, and Severus felt sorry for her. He had been surprised that she would confide so much in him, but she was obviously devastated and in need of an acquaintance.

Hermione felt the cushions of the couch sink under Severus' weight. A gentle hand on her back was all it took for her to launch herself into his arms.

Severus looked down at the weeping witch and was reminded of a time long ago when Narcissa Malfoy had done something similar.

"If your children are as brilliant as their mother is, I am certain they will come to understand everything in time," he allowed quietly.

Hermione drew back at his words. She looked up with an expression of surprise and confusion.

Severus' lips twitched into a lop-sided grin. "Yes, I am at liberty to admit it now. I read your excerpt in *The Potions Journal* back in 2000. I see you left text book parroting behind and indulged in experimentation."

Hermione released a deep breath and fanned herself with her hand. "I don't know if I can handle all this at once. You being alive and now you're complimenting me."

Severus chuckled, the sound deep and joyous as it filled the room. How odd it felt to converse with another human being. He could feel the warmth of her body as she sat beside him. She smelled of raspberries and vanilla. It was strangely satisfying and a little unsettling to be near someone after all this time alone.

"I'm sorry to have troubled you with my baggage. I... I'm not usually like this. All tears and no composure."

"It all rages swiftly like a stream after a storm, doesn't it?"

She nodded, wondering how it was he seemed to know exactly how she felt.

"I remember falling back and hitting my head on one of the gravestones after I realized who you were. I appreciate you bringing me here out of the rain and healing my injury."

"You are welcome."

The honest politeness caused Hermione's lips to twitch into a lop-sided grin. "Who are you really and what have you done with Severus Snape?"

Severus appeared bewildered. "I beg your pardon?"

"The Severus Snape that I remember would never have been this pleasant to a Gryffindor know-it-all."

"The Snape you remember died twenty years ago when his time for lies and deception was over. Of course, I have retained some of his arrogance."

"And his intelligence I'm sure."

The smile appearing on his face disappeared at her words.

"I'm sorry, did I say something wrong?"

He shook his head. He was unused to compliments of any kind, and one from a handsome young woman, despite the fact that she had been his student once, mattered a great deal to him. He nearly laughed at how one silly compliment made him realize how starved for human contact he really was.

"It's probably late..." she told him nervously. "I should leave you to your... privacy."

It was obvious to Severus that Hermione Granger was torn. She wanted to stay and yet she also wanted to go. He realized where he wanted her.

He moistened his dry lips. "And where will you go?"

"I... I haven't gotten that far yet." She lowered her head and sighed.

"It is obvious to me that you cannot return to your home tonight. In fact I will not permit it. Mr. Weasley needs to calm down and you need to think things over."

Hermione opened her mouth to protest, but Severus cut her off. "I will not take no for an answer," he said firmly. "The years may have softened me, but only to a point. Winky?"

The house-elf appeared immediately.

"Will you please make certain the guest bedroom has new linens?"

The elf nodded and was gone.

"Severus, I couldn't!" Hermione was on her feet, her eyes wide as saucers, and her hands gesturing wildly. "It's very kind of you to offer me somewhere to sleep, but I cannot intrude further on the hospitality you have already shown me."

Severus stood and stilled her hands, his own moving to rest on her elbows. The feel of another person was so foreign to him, but very welcome. "Let me do this... Hermione. I will be offended if you do not accept."

Hermione pursed her lips.

"I'm certain you have more questions," he allowed, knowing she always had a yearning for more knowledge. "I will attempt to answer what I can."

She nodded and reached for her tea.

As she sipped the cooling liquid and then reached for a biscuit, she realized he had called her Hermione.

TBC....