

Back to Basics

by Alison

Hermione Weasley runs into Severus Snape in Muggle London eight years after he was presumed dead! How could this happen? And can he trust Hermione to be his Secret Keeper?
Deathly Hallows compliant. Spoilers.

Complete short story

Chapter 1 of 1

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The worst thing about shopping in a Muggle area at eight months pregnant, Hermione Weasley decided, was not the crowds, or the noise, or even the heat. It was the *humidity*.

Of course, the fact that it was mid-August should have made her decide to stay in her comfortably cool house, but she had cabin fever. She'd taken maternity leave from her Ministry job two weeks ago and instead of enjoying the pleasant idyll she'd imagined, had quickly become bored. No doubt boredom would vanish once her baby daughter was born, but until then, there were only so many times one could re-read "*Raising Magical Babies*" by Bertha Bubbel.

Hermione had arranged with her mother to come shopping for baby clothes this hot Saturday morning, but the arrival of an emergency impacted wisdom tooth at her parent's dental surgery had caused the plan to be shelved.

Undaunted, Hermione had decided to go by herself. Molly had given her a full handmade layette set for the new little witch about to be born into the Weasley clan, but unfortunately the Wizarding world's love of velvets, lace and loud, clashing colours extended to infants. Hermione had thanked Molly profusely while at the same time silently resolving that the only time her new daughter would wear the horrible clothes would be when they visited Molly.

So now Hermione was in need of baby clothes, Muggle ones specifically. Terry romper suits, easy-care fabrics and no-fuss popper buttons. Nappies with Velcro closures. Pacifiers. Bottles, bibs and booties. Plus all the other paraphernalia Hermione's mother assured her was needed. Hermione, as an only child, was a little staggered to realize just how much a new-born required.

But it was hot and humid, and her feet ached after traipsing around the streets for the better part of three hours. The beaded bag she held was far fuller than its small size indicated; she had nearly everything on her mother's extensive list inside, including a three-foot-high teddy bear. She'd lugged it out of the store under one arm and only stuffed it into her bag once she was inside the shopping mall restroom, out of sight of Muggles.

Now all she wanted was to get back to the secluded little side street she'd arrived at and Disapparate back home with her stash.

She was dreamily imagining her feet up on her sofa with a nice cold glass of lemonade in hand when a shop door she was passing opened and a dark-skinned lady with beautifully braided and beaded hair walked out. Hermione paused to let her pass and was almost bowled over as two young giggling children raced out after their mother. Due to her now quite large stomach, Hermione could not side-step in time and might have fallen but for the man following the children, who quickly caught her arm, steadying her until she'd regained her balance.

The woman turned and said sharply, "Children! Where are your manners? You nearly knocked this poor lady over!"

"Sorry, Miss!" the elder one, a girl of about five, said. Her little brother, not much older than a toddler, put his thumb in his mouth and regarded Hermione silently with big eyes.

"I *do* apologize," their mother said, stooping to pick up the beaded bag that Hermione had dropped and handing it back to her.

"Are you all right?" asked the man who had steadied her, and Hermione froze, her eyes going wide at the sound of his voice. It was a voice she could never forget, one she'd heard in every Potions class for six years when she was a student. She turned and saw that her ears had not deceived her.

Severus Snape had done something to his nose; it was smaller and the marked hook had vanished. His hair was cut short in the Muggle style and he wore casual Muggle clothing. His eyes widened slightly as she turned to face him, and she saw recognition dawn in them. But even as she opened her mouth to frame a question out of the myriad that his reappearance had sparked in her mind, his expression closed off and he moved to rejoin his family.

"Well, if you're all right, Miss, we'd better be getting on. Children, mind where you're going, no more charging out of doors without looking."

"Okay, Daddy," said the eldest.

The man took the toddler's hand, and the family moved off down the crowded street.

Hermione stared after the retreating group. Severus Snape was *alive*? But how could that be? She'd seen him die in the Shrieking Shack and had been present at his burial eight years ago! How was he now walking the streets of Muggle London with what were presumably his wife and two children?

Her tiredness had been abruptly forgotten in the face of this mystery. Almost without conscious volition, she found herself following behind the group before they could vanish into the teeming crowd, keeping them in sight.

As she followed, she wondered, could she have been mistaken? It had been eight years since she'd seen him, and the dead only walked if they were Inferi or ghosts, neither of which seemed to be the case here. But no, he'd recognized her. Hermione was sure of it. Why then had he not said anything, anything at all?

She trailed along behind, keeping her distance as much as possible and staying under cover of the crowd whenever the family paused. They were obscured for a moment behind a line of people waiting for a bus, and when Hermione got closer, she found that she'd lost sight of them. Then she saw a café next to where they'd last been and decided to see if they'd gone inside. Sidling up to the shop-front window, and under the pretence of looking at the menu posted onto the glass there, Hermione glanced inside. The woman and two children were seated, but she couldn't see Snape anywhere. She was scanning the rest of the café when she jumped at the sound of a sardonic voice right behind her.

"All right, Miss Granger, shall we settle this now? And then maybe you'll do me the courtesy of not following us."

Hermione swung about. Snape was leaning one shoulder against the brick wall of the café, his arms folded, regarding her with one eyebrow raised.

"You're alive!" She winced as soon as she'd said it, knowing what his likely response would be.

"Obviously. I see you haven't lost your fine grasp of summing up any situation."

"But ... but how? I saw you die; I was with Harry that night. And I was with the group that recovered your body from the shack. How is it that you're walking about now, alive and well?"

He sighed. "I could just *Obliviate* you I suppose," he murmured consideringly. "It might save a lot of time, especially as it's none of your business anyway ... "

Hermione lifted her chin defiantly as her hand gripped the wand in her pocket. "You could try to wipe my memory," she answered. "But I'm quick. And do we really want to end up dueling in the middle of a busy Muggle street?"

Snape glanced at the crowds of people passing by, currently paying them no attention, and shook his head slightly. "If I tell you, I want your word of honor you repeat it to nobody else. I mean it, Miss Granger. Not a soul."

Hermione nodded. "All right. You have my word."

He stared at her for a moment, and Hermione had the oddest feeling, as if he were reading her very mind. But then he nodded as he came to a decision. "I told Della my wife that I thought I recognized you as one of my former students. She took the children into the café for ice-cream while I went to find you, so we have a few minutes." He paused for a second, searching her face. "What are your memories of that night?"

"The three of us Harry, Ron and I were in the tunnel leading into the Shrieking Shack. We were under Harry's invisibility cloak and saw Voldemort set the snake onto you," Hermione answered.

Snape nodded slowly. "I seem to recall others there behind Potter. You three were always joined at the hips at school. The only case of conjoined triplets in the world."

Hermione ignored the barb. "We saw you die, Professor," she stated.

"You saw me go into deep shock as a result of blood loss, Miss Granger," he corrected her. "I'm told that the effects resemble death. Did any of you bother to check for a pulse at all?"

"N no, we didn't," Hermione answered. "But ... there was so much blood. We assumed "

He nodded. "You assumed wrongly. Not that I blame you, I was sure I was dying as well. The snake's venom lowered my metabolic rate, and that's what saved my life. I would have bled to death otherwise, but the poison slowed my heart beat right down and gave my blood time to clot. Once the wound sealed over the blood loss ceased."

Hermione cast her memory back eight years. Harry had been bitten by Nagini when they'd visited Godric's Hollow together, searching for Horcruxes. He'd been ill from the snake's venom, but had survived. And she recalled Arthur Weasley had been in a bad way after he'd been bitten, but that was due more to massive blood loss. It appeared that Nagini's poison was not automatically fatal, at least not to an otherwise healthy adult.

"When I regained consciousness, I was weak, very weak, both from the effects of the poison and the blood loss. I couldn't move. I drifted in and out of sleep for most of the next day, lying on that filthy floor. It wasn't until the next evening that I was finally able to sit up and conjure some water for myself. I stayed in the shack for another two days before I felt strong enough to Disapparate back to my house in Manchester where I could rest and recover my strength."

"But we collected your body," Hermione objected. "I was with the team that went to the Shrieking Shack. It was ... oh, of *course!*" She clapped her hand to her forehead at her own stupidity and looked back up at him. "You transfigured something to look like you, didn't you?"

Snape was watching her with an amused quirk to his mouth. He nodded slowly. "What you collected, and presumably later buried, was a dead pigeon that had fallen out of the rafters. I heard you coming, transfigured the bird and used the Disillusionment Charm on myself." His eyes raked her face. "I remember you were the only one who cried when you saw what you thought was my body, Miss Granger. That is another reason I'm disinclined to *Oblivate* you."

Hermione looked down. "I felt bad," she murmured. "We were all so wrong about you. When I saw you ... what I thought was you ... dead in the dirt, I was ashamed of the way I used to think about you." She looked back up, meeting his eyes again. "But why, Professor? We knew your true allegiance by then. Why not just let us find you and take you back to Hogwarts for treatment?"

He was silent for a moment before answering. "I did a lot of thinking when I was lying there in the Shrieking Shack," he said slowly. "It occurred to me that for most of my life, from the time I went to Hogwarts, I'd been used. My housemates in Slytherin were happy to befriend me once they found out my facility with both homework and hexes. Gryffindors well, the less said about James Potter and Sirius Black the better, I suppose, except that they enjoyed using me as a whipping boy. The Dark Lord offered me power and recognition while giving me nothing in reality for my service. Dumbledore ... ah, Albus positively *excelled* at the subtle art of manipulation! All of them eventually abandoned me to my fate when they had no further use for me, and there I was, left to die ignominiously on the floor. Nobody ever cared about me personally. No, I was just something to be used and discarded when they were finished with me."

Snape had a faraway expression on his face as he spoke, as he remembered. There was no bitterness there, just a sense of utter resignation. Hermione felt tears prick at her eyes, and she blinked rapidly to clear them. How wrong they had all been about this man! Even Harry now admitted he'd misjudged him and had insisted that a portrait of Snape be hung in the Headmaster's office at Hogwarts. But that seemed such a paltry payment for all Snape had endured.

Snape's eyes focused again on Hermione. "So you see, Miss Granger, I was in no hurry to reveal myself to any of you. Also, I wasn't entirely sure, even then, that someone wouldn't attempt to kill me in revenge for Albus's murder, despite them knowing where my true loyalties lay. It occurred to me that somebody would come for my body, and for the time being I wanted none to suspect that I was still alive.

"And as I gradually recovered at my home in Spinner's End, I became even more positive that staying 'dead' was a very good idea. You see, I'm a half-blood. I cope relatively well in the Muggle world, having been brought up in it. I used to think, childishly I suppose, that being a wizard somehow made me special. But the reality was far different.

"As I lay in my bed recovering, I resolved to live from then on as a Muggle. Let the Wizarding world do what they wished. I wanted nothing more to do with them. To all intents and purposes, Severus Snape is dead and buried. My name is now Toby Prince, a retired high school science teacher. I keep my wand with me, but I rarely do magic with it anymore. The magical community can go to hell as far as I'm concerned and good riddance to the lot of them."

Hermione stared at him. His face had become animated, and his eyes were defiant, even though his voice remained calm and quiet. "And are you happy now, Professor?" she asked at last.

He blinked. "Happy?" He sighed. "Let us just say that I'm content with my lot, Miss Granger. Della knows nothing of my past. She believes, like most Muggles, that magic is a myth, a fairy story for children. I'm fond of her. The children are hers from her previous marriage, and I'm legally their stepfather. But I've been with Della ever since Cody was born, and both he and Abby think of me as their father. My commitment to have nothing more to do with the Wizarding world extends to my having no more children. After I recovered, I had some plastic surgery performed on my face. I didn't want to be recognized. And I also had an operation to make me infertile. I will bring no little wizards or witches into the world to be made as unhappy as I was." Here his eyes flicked over Hermione's baby bump in sardonic amusement. "Unlike yourself, I see."

Hermione flushed. "Not all of us are as disillusioned with the world as you are, Professor. But then," she added gently, "not all of us have been as badly treated as you were, either." She reached out one hand and laid it on his shoulder, saw his eyes flicker in surprise. "I want to thank you for everything you did. You made it possible for us to win against Voldemort. I'm grateful. I know Harry is as well. I won't betray your confidence."

He searched her face for a moment, and then a small smile appeared, a smile that didn't have the usual cynicism behind it but was open and frank. "Thank you, Miss Granger but you're not Miss Granger anymore, are you?" he questioned.

Hermione smiled back. "No. It's Hermione Weasley now."

"Oh. Ronald, Fred or George?"

"Ron. Fred died in the battle with Voldemort."

"Ah. I'm sorry to hear that. I remember the Weasley twins. A pair of bright students, if only they applied themselves." He paused and then asked, "Would you ... er, like to meet Della and the children? I'm sure she'd be happy to meet a former student of mine. You only have to remember my name is Toby Prince and that I was your high school science teacher ..."

Hermione nodded. "I'd like that," she answered. The incongruity of the situation struck her, and she thought how odd it was, she a practicing witch, he a former wizard, discussing their private lives as a crowd of oblivious Muggles moved ceaselessly by them. As they turned towards the café, she said, "What are you doing now, Professor?"

"After my recovery, I used my savings to start up a small naturopathy business. I've been lucky enough to be quite successful. I now own four shops. Della was my secretary in the first business, and she's now manager of the largest shop and partner in all of them."

Hermione smiled. She suspected that it was more than luck that had made Severus Snape (*Toby Prince*, she corrected herself) successful. His knowledge of potions and healing would have come in very useful in his chosen field; all of his remedies would have worked. She wasn't surprised that the business had grown.

As they approached the table where Della and the children sat, the toddler with his face covered in ice-cream, the little girl swinging her legs happily, Hermione glanced at her former Potions teacher's face. He was smiling at his family, a genuine and open expression that smoothed out the harsh lines of his face and made him appear years younger.

He's happy, Hermione thought to herself. He's living as a Muggle, but he's finally found peace. I wish him well.

The End

Author's note: If you liked this story, please have a read of my original story "Love Inhuman" at this link:

<http://www.thepetulantpoetess.com/viewstory.php?sid=11932>

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