

Scar Tissue

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Scant hours after the bloody final battle, Hermione tries to suppress the guilty urge to reaffirm that she's alive. *Post-Hogwarts, no spoilers, complete in chapter*

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Chapter 1 of 1

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He walks away from the group huddled around the bonfire, the dazed, stunned people with whom he fought today.

There are three separate fires, the smallish one they made included. The second and third would more correctly be characterized as pyres, for they consume the bodies of heroes and villains.

The destroyed remains of the house Lord Voldemort was holed up in has sufficed for fuel. Spelled dry, the wood forms the base of the two large platforms which brightly burn the corpses of Harry Potter, Ron Weasley, Lucius Malfoy, Tom Riddle himself. There are others. Twenty seven in all. Seven heroes, twenty villains. The bodies are separated, of course. But they burn the same, once the magical soul is gone.

He tells himself he is making sure the pyres are burning correctly. He wants nothing more than to be sure the earthly remains of the felled Death Eaters are reduced to gray ashes. He is the only one with the stomach to tend them. No one asked him specifically to perform the task, but he is expected to. In reality, it is not gruesome, as all is hidden by the roaring flames. Spells have been cast over the two pyres to contain smell and smoke.

Once this task is complete, he goes searching for her. She left the circle some time ago, but those gathered were too addled to go look for her. One could not blame them. They had fought a long, hard battle and witnessed more death and destruction than any one witch or wizard had a right to.

They are sequestered in a copse of trees, but the evergreens have spaces between their hulking trunks and places where someone can escape the fires of destruction. Against the snow, he is a black slash of prowling panther. He does not know where he will find her, but instinct says it will be near the spruce trees and with back turned toward the desolation.

There are no footprints, and he is not surprised. Likely she spelled them away. But he can smell her. The heavy cling of wood smoke from the small fire permeates her thick hair. Following the scent brings him to her. She is sitting in a small, cleared circle, robes pulled tightly around her. The temperature is near freezing, and he can tell by the sky that another layer of snow is imminent.

"Miss Granger," he says by way of acknowledgement.

She does not move her head from its position, perched on her knees.

"Can't you call me by my fucking name?" she says calmly, and he knows the expletive is a defense mechanism. He has never heard her curse and he has known her now for ten years.

"I cannot," Severus Snape says. "You shall forever remain Miss Granger in my mind."

"A student. A child," she murmurs.

He takes his wand and blasts away snow to make his own circle beside her.

"A student or a child would not have fought the way you did today. A student or a child could not be feeling the depth of grief and sorrow you are experiencing now. My use of your courtesy title is merely a matter of rote, not a mark of derision."

Finally she moves her head and turns to face him as he sits next to her. Her eyes are stark.

"I will likely always call you Professor Snape," she admits.

He is silent, because he knows she is perceptive enough to realize he has come looking for her, and Gryffindor enough to blurt out her reason for leaving and apologies.

"I'm fine out here," she whispers. "I just could not stay with them one moment longer."

She is referring to the group of bewildered fighters sitting around the fire. Charlie Weasley, Minerva, Tonks, Kingsley Shacklebolt, Neville Longbottom, Colin Creevey. More people than that circle the leaping flames, but they are the faces most abjectly etched with shock and despair.

Without prompting, she continues.

"I feel odd. Not ill, I mean, but just...I feel restless. I can't sit still. I cried and cried with everyone else, and now I feel empty," she says quickly, as if knowing he will snap at her to get to the point.

He knows what she is feeling. He has felt it too. Survivor's guilt is the worst kind. Grief is a tricky bitch, and can't be bothered to send the same despair to everyone. It feels far more satisfying to wallow in guilt, to scream and cry anguish to the heavens. But misery comes in many forms, and to be cursed with the feverish need to confirm one's living status can be the harshest sort of despondency to bear.

"You are concerned the others will berate you for not showing outward sadness," he states, and she nods emphatically. She turns toward him, her pale face painfully open in the moonlight.

"That's it exactly. I'm sure it's shock," she says logically, rapidly, and he can see her need to rationalize her feelings so she can categorize and neatly file them away.

"Of course it's shock," he snorts. "Do you think even I am immune?"

Her mouth had been open to answer, but his sharp remark shuts her up.

"Consider my life, Miss Granger. For more than twenty years, I have witnessed similar scenes. I am only a man, lest you forget. Seeing the deaths of people I once considered comrades affects me. Seeing the deaths of your friends hurts me as well, though you know we were not close. It would be a dishonor to their memory and to you for me to pretend otherwise."

"So you didn't hate them," she says woodenly.

"I disliked them, to be sure. I hated the Dark Lord. I did not hate young Potter or Weasley. Or Longbottom or you, for that matter."

He turns to look at her as he says this, so she can perhaps pick up on his sincerity. His black eyes do not express much in the way of sentiments, but this is perhaps the closest he has come in a long time. She seems to understand and digest his proclamation.

"Professor," she begins, faltering. "I need to tell someone this. I'm only telling you because you're here, and likely after this night I won't see you again."

He thinks this is a fair assessment, as she works for the Ministry in London. For this night, he will allow her to reveal her emotions. It is the least he can do. Perhaps he can keep the insidious threads of scar tissue from building within her. She is not as mentally and physically scarred as he is, and he thinks she should stay that way.

"The feelings I'm having are wholly inappropriate," she says desperately. "Not necessarily to us, but to this night. I'm having urges that should not be creeping into my mind. Not here. Not now."

"You feel the need to have relations with another person to reaffirm that you are simply alive. It is not based on real-life want or need, but is spur-of-the-moment. It often causes shame and regret," Severus says shortly. He knows the definition well. He has lived it.

"Yes," she says soberly, and now he can see tiny starry tears in her eyes. Her hands have gathered into fists and suddenly a wave of realization washes over him.

"Miss Granger, you cannot, certainly, I mean..." he sputters, feeling something suspiciously like a blush suffuse his sallow features.

He has seated himself close enough to her that she can rear up on her knees and grab him by the clasp of his robe, which she does.

"Look," she says roughly, dripping tears. "For seven years you would not, could not help me with anything. I just want this one thing. I don't want any strings. I just want to feel whole again."

He can smell the wood smoke in her hair, stronger now as she rather effortlessly pulls him up to her face. Severus knows what it is to be in her situation. It is also when he was last with a woman; for the very same reason she wants to be with him.

She baits him. "Unless you would prefer I was a man..." she says.

She is flat on her back before she can take her next breath.

Their mouths meet messily, his long nose momentarily getting in the way before he can get her situated to his liking. Her fingers gracelessly tear at his robes, and he shoves his hips hard into hers to keep her distracted while he picks apart the clasp himself.

A fine snow shower has begun, and she spears her fingers through his dampened hair. She uses her slightly charred wand to cast a warming spell around them as he struggles with his coat and buttoned-down shirt.

"Undress yourself, Miss Granger," he snarls, passing button after myriad button through embroidered holes to bare his skin. She stops finger combing his hair, and makes short work of her own clasp and throws open her robes like wings. Underneath all she is wearing a simple jumper and thick winter tights, undoubtedly to create ease of movement in battle.

She smells of sweat and woman, something that intensifies when she reaches down to shuck her jumper. He is standing, removing his boots and trousers. As she sits up to unclasp her bra, he takes hold of the waistband of her tights and peels them down her legs.

He is painfully hard, something the floating snowflakes have done nothing to dispel. Once he is back on his knees he savagely thrusts his tongue through her folds, picking up her taste. She is pulling him back up her now-nude body, and they share her taste ravenously.

He is afraid he will not last long; though his hand was fairly recent his last woman was more than two years ago. His fears are nearly realized when her hand clasps him more than firmly and tugs none-too-gently on his erection.

"Don't!" he rasps, reaching down to guide her wandering hand. In the moment he takes to position himself before her entrance, he looks up and regards her face. She is flushed, tangled, curly hair dotted with melting ice crystals. Her eyes are wide and pupils dilated, and all he can wonder is if he would have found her attractive had circumstances not put her beneath him on this frozen ground.

"Now," she directs, teeth clenched. He slides in, and he can see her momentary wince of pain. She's no virgin, but the war isn't exactly conducive to having an active love life. Likely she's been as celibate as he.

"Hard," she hisses, after his first strokes apparently don't pass muster.

He complies. He doesn't necessarily care if he hurts her or leaves bruises on her hips, because in the week they will take to fade she will be reminded that she is gloriously alive and needs to carry on where her friends cannot.

Her hard-tipped breasts sway enticingly to the beat of their coupling, and he licks away stray snowflakes while she tries her best to wind her entire body around him. Harsh, wordless pants fill his ear and inexplicably they are highly erotic, speeding his climax.

He's not about to come first. Though her moans are enticing and encouraging, he's not so naïve as to think his cock alone can bring her the release she needs. He knows all about soft, tiny circles, but there's no time for that. Balancing precariously on his right elbow, he rescues his forearm from her grasp and wedges it as best he can between their moving parts.

Her clit is slightly swollen, allowing him to locate it with relative ease. Lightly grasping it between thumb and forefinger, he uses fervent but indirect stimulation on the sides of the tiny, erect organ. She immediately reacts, and her dark eyes close reflexively as a soft *oh* escapes her reddened lips.

She is straining toward orgasm; he can almost see it in her straightforward mind. Finally he has something to concentrate on for a few moments, to hold his own impending release at bay.

"Relax," he murmurs in her ear, the casual word feeling foreign on his tongue. "Focus on the sensations."

For the first time in memory, she follows his directions without question. Her grip on him softens, and he keeps up the mindless but determined rhythm of thrust-and-stroke. In time, her nails begin to dig back into his skin. Her swollen lips, once tightly closed, are now parted and issuing undignified but excited moans.

And then he catches a fleeting glimpse of *la petite morte*, feels her body tense slightly beneath his. A bit of added slickness eases his way, and she is complete. He feels sweat roll down his back, and the control he was trying to vainly exercise melts along with the snow on his heated skin.

His thrusts pick up speed and presently his release follows. He won't allow himself to collapse upon her, though he thinks it might be nice to do so. Her chin is now hooked over his shoulder, and he breathes heavily, trying to calm down his body.

"Thank you, Professor," she says evenly, without hint of mockery or recrimination. It is her simple gratitude that spurs him to action. Without acknowledging her words, he sits up and collects his wand, casting a contraception spell and a cleansing spell.

Consciously trying to decide the correct length of time to linger, he finally feels it is time to leave.

"We must put ourselves to rights," he says. She nods, and he helps her to her feet. They busy themselves dressing, each studiously avoiding looking at the other. On the short trek back to encroaching reality, he is struck by a pang of something indefinable. He abruptly stops in the ankle-deep snow, causing Hermione to cease her steps as well. Through her mussed hair, she regards him curiously.

"You are welcome, Miss Granger."

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