

The Strength Beyond

by kizzy7

Severus receives comfort from Hermione. Canon-compliant.

One-Shot

Chapter 1 of 1

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Severus blindly stumbled into the dungeon. The anger and the hurt that he felt were so real—*sofucking* real—that he thought he might sob. Or kill himself. Or kill Albus before the allotted time.

How could Albus do this to him? Severus thought—he had bloody well allowed himself to believe—that he could perhaps atone for his years of mistakes. He would gladly give his own life to rid the world of the Dark Lord. But to take another life? And the life of the one man who truly knew him?

What would Lily think?

Lily, who was all that was good and beautiful. Severus often imagined Lily looking down upon him. He tried to do what was right, for her. Was this right? Was murdering the Headmaster the right course of action?

Dumbledore assured him it was the only way. The only way.

And eventually, he would have to guide *her* son to death.

With a sob, Severus collapsed on the floor, shaking.

"I won't do it, Albus," he said into the empty room. "I can't do it." His voice was a whisper, weak and fragile. He cringed.

"I can't do it," he repeated, stronger this time. But even as he said the words, he knew they were false. He had bound himself to Albus Dumbledore mind, body, and soul—he would do anything the Headmaster asked.

Severus sat up and leaned back against his desk, running his hands through his hair. How had his life come to this?

This was perhaps what he deserved, but never what he had wanted. When he was younger, cowering from his father's beatings and children's insults, he had always imagined that somehow his life would be good, eventually. He had dreamed of a good woman who loved him, brilliant breakthroughs in potions research, possibly a child or two.

Perhaps the most difficult thing about his current dilemma was reconciling his childish, naïve longings for happiness with the darkness that was his life. Albus' inane request for death was simply the catalyst to push Severus over his metaphorical edge, effectively killing the voice deep inside him that simply longed for something *good*.

"There is nothing good for me here," he said quietly. "Maybe in the Afterlife... I'll find you, Lily. Maybe then I'll have your forgiveness."

A quiet knock interrupted his musings, and Severus scowled, willing the intruder to let him be. The knocking, however, only increased in volume until he saw his door crack open.

"Professor Snape?" came a voice tentatively. "Sir?"

Severus scowled and rubbed his eyes, still stinging sharply with unshed tears. It was the Granger girl.

"Get out of here," he snapped harshly.

She opened the door and stepped into the classroom, fidgeting with her skirt nervously.

"I just have a question about the assignment, sir. I—oh! Sir! What happened? What's wrong? What can I do?"

"You can leave, Miss Granger. Now." He attempted to fuse his words with an anger he just did not feel.

"I can't leave, sir. Please. What can I do?" Her voice was tinged with desperation.

Impossibly, the girl came towards him and knelt beside him. Her hand, small and delicate, hesitantly skimmed his forehead, smoothing back his hair. Severus flinched at her touch and attempted to pull away.

"Professor," she breathed. "Please. How can I help?"

Severus looked at her and saw her—*really* saw her—for the first time in the six years he had known her. Her mouth was puckered slightly, her eyes were wide, and her face was flushed with colour. He did not need Legilimency to read the emotions playing across her face—concern, respect, fear, and something distantly related to affection. Suddenly, Severus felt something akin to hope constrict painfully in his chest.

"There is good here, after all," he muttered, and she nodded as if she understood him. And perhaps she did.

Her fingers lightly caressed his face, tracing his harsh angles and unforgiving planes. He leaned into her touch, allowing himself to forget everything—the impending war, Dumbledore's request, his own fears. He closed his eyes and concentrated on the feel of her fingers against his skin. She felt so real.

It was intoxicating.

When he felt her lips, cool and smooth, flutter against his cheek, he sighed and wrapped his arms around her waist. She settled into him with a breathy moan.

"Hermione," he whispered.

"Yes?" she said into his skin, and he could feel her lips moving against him.

"Forgive me," he pleaded, and his voice cracked.

"I forgive you, Severus," she said as she kissed his forehead.

"Hermione," he whispered again, and he fell asleep in her arms.

When Severus opened his eyes, she was gone, but he could still feel her presence around him. She awoke in him feelings he had never known—calm, peace, quiet. He carried her with him until the end.

A/N Thanks to my beta and the admins at TPP. I wrote this in response to my husband. We were watching ootp the other night, and he said, 'kizzy, I do not understand your obsession with Snape and Hermione. In real life, nothing ever would have happened between them.' By 'real life' he, of course, meant canon. I sputtered. I blanched. I launched into a twenty minute diatribe about two like-minded intellectual individuals finding love and a lemony happily-ever-after. In the end, I wrote this. Thanks for reading.