

The Measure of Mercy

by moiramountain

A profound moment between Severus Snape and a victim of the Dark Lord.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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"Severus, help me... please... please." Her entreaties had been abruptly silenced by the flick of a wand, and the woman, helplessly suspended in slow rotation above the long table, knew her death was a breath away. Unable to slip her bonds, deprived now of speech, she wept silently, her fear a palpable aura around her. She had implored her former colleague for some measure of mercy, but seated beside the Dark Lord, he had glanced up at her dispassionately, acknowledging her presence with a mere, "Ah, yes."

Severus sat silent as shadow beside his master, his face quite impassive, waiting patiently for what he needed. And soon enough it came, as usual, so predictable. The Dark Lord never failed to seize an opportunity to deliver yet another scathing diatribe on blood purity, and the absolute necessity for total dominion over Mudbloods and Muggles, and all other "lesser" beings he deemed unworthy of existence. Assuredly this rant would follow the same senseless pattern as all the other harangues, with Voldemort reveling in his own scalding oratory for several minutes. The man's pontificating was a blessing to Severus, providing distraction and suitable cover for what must be accomplished swiftly, without detection. Keeping his facade of respectful interest and obedient acquiescence resolute, Severus extended his thoughts, like smoke curling under a locked door, to reach the hapless witch hanging above him, her face now turned in his direction, her eyes frantic as those of a bird in the snare.

"Charity, it is I. Look at me." Her eyes widened in recognition and terror as his thoughts first touched her, the resonant timbre of his voice low and quiet, not barbed with its usual sting of bitterness and sarcasm. He placed his image before her, not with the inscrutable marble visage of the Death Eater, but with his true face – harrowed by rage, loss, sorrow and regret, lit by the defiant and tormented eyes of the spy, the man most trusted, in absolute service to the Light, to sit at the right hand of Darkness. "I cannot save you. Were I to be discovered, my intent revealed... too much would become clear, the deaths of too many made pointless." Releasing into the implacable suffering of that voice, the depthless well of those eyes, she understood and her desperate struggles slowed as she allowed herself to accept this realization and receive his presence as a calming draught, a potion offered to ease and comfort.

"Try not to be afraid. I am able at least to shield you from pain, and Dumbledore is near, waiting." And here, he filled her mind with the image of her beloved Headmaster dressed in robes of glacial white, his arms extended ready to embrace her, standing on the far shore of the loch of Hogwarts, its waters dancing green and silver in the sunlight of a perfect summer day. Sensing her dark Angel of Death standing close behind her, she attempted to turn to look at him, but his strong slender hands gripped her shoulders, directing her firmly but gently to face the loch, his voice beautiful as phoenix song in her ear, a low cadence of mercy granted.

"I will not leave you. This will end in an instant. You must focus on the water, Charity, only on the water... only on the water..."

She fastened her gaze on the waves of the loch as they leapt in their joyous dance – emerald green, the green of someone's eyes – she could not quite remember whose...

The flash of the Killing Curse came swift and cruel, and the Death Eaters around the table fell back in terror of their Lord. Quailing in awe, many were bemused and troubled by the face of Charity Burbage, for it carried a smile of perfect peace. And as the great snake was summoned, Severus sat silent as shadow beside his master, his

face quite impassive, waiting patiently.

Author's Note: All characters are of course the property of J. K. This story has been pulling at me. It occurred to me that when Charity addressed her pleas to "Severus" rather than to "Snape" – somehow still seeing the man, rather than the murderer – she afforded him a measure of mercy as well.