

The Devil You Know

by melusin

Short drabble series written for the GS100 Community's 'Voldemort Wins' challenge.
Darkish.

Prelude.

Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer. I'm just playing in JKR's universe. No money has changed hands.

A/N: Thanks to Septentrion for the beta.

I am also very grateful to the TPP mods for recently granting me validated author status.

This short series may have a full-length, non-drabble format, follow up. Because of this, I've fiddled with it slightly since it was beta'd. If I've made any subsequent typos, please drop me a line.

'Enjoy your... nuptials, Severus.' Grinning lewdly, the last of his brothers left his bed-chamber, slamming the door behind him.

Finally alone with his bride, Severus lifted the candle higher to properly examine the shivering girl lying naked under the covers. She stared back at him defiantly. Grabbing his dressing gown, Severus threw it on the bed. 'Put that on, Miss Granger. We have much to discuss.'

He walked over to the fire, aware of the rustling of bedclothes as Hermione got out of bed. Even as she approached, Severus could not bring himself to look at her accusing, embittered face.

'Sit,' he said, not turning his head. Severus continued to stare into the flames while the silence stretched between them. He sighed. 'Spit it out, Miss Granger.'

'Why?' she asked. Filled with a thousand questions, Hermione could not think of anything more than that.

Severus looked his wife of five hours. 'Why were you spared?'

She nodded dumbly.

'The Dark Lord has always been fascinated by your power, Miss Granger,' he began. 'So much so, it is impossible for him to believe you are Muggle-born. He ordered me to investigate your ancestry—'

'But there are no witches in my family.'

'Must you always interrupt, girl,' he snarled, and she flinched. Severus closed his eyes briefly. He had no desire to frighten her. 'I managed to falsify the records. You now have a Welsh great-great-grandmother who was a witch on your mother's side—a descendent of the wizards of Myddfai, to be precise. The Dark Lord was very impressed.'

Hermione could only stare at him. 'Why would you do that? Why are you telling me all this?'

'To save you—'

'There are worse things than death.'

Severus averted his eyes. 'I am not someone who lusts after young girls,' he said quietly.

Severus was silent for a moment. 'The Dark Lord offered you to me as a reward for my services,' he said eventually. 'If I had declined, he would have given you to the Lestranges. Would you have preferred that?'

'No.' She sighed. 'Why did they strip me and...molest me like that if I am your... reward?'

Severus shifted uncomfortably. 'It is the Dark Lord's way of showing that what he gives, he can just as easily take away.'

Hermione's eyes widened. 'But if you don't want me, then why...?'

'Because you *matter*... Because together we could defeat... *him*,' he spat.

Curiouser and curiouser. 'You-you were—on our side?' Hermione couldn't quite bring herself to believe it.

He snorted. 'Always. And before you ask me, I'm admitting this to you because a wife cannot be made to bear witness against her husband.'

'Oh,' she said. 'But I still don't see how the two of us can accomplish what Harry and the Order failed to do. I don't even have a wand anymore.'

Severus stepped away from the fire and knelt before her. 'I know it's a lot to ask after everything you've been through, but I must ask you to trust me.'

Hermione chewed her bottom lip nervously. She didn't know if she could trust him, but what choice did she have? 'What do you want me to do?'

'Miss... Hermione,' Severus began. 'I would never force you to do anything against your will or lay a hand on you without your consent.' He put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a small potion bottle. 'Did you know that when a marriage is consummated, the magic of the wizard and witch is bound together and can never be undone, even if the couple go their separate ways?'

'I had heard, yes.'

'Male and female energies, Hermione, bound together. Combined, they are more powerful than the sum of their individual parts. Severus held the bottle between his thumb and forefinger so Hermione could see it. 'I... have discovered a way of harnessing and enhancing that bound magic even further.'

'Enough to defeat V-Him?' she asked, feeling the first glimmer of hope stir inside.

Severus grinned. 'We are both of us powerful in our own right. Imagine what we could achieve together. We would be practically invincible.' He put the bottle down and hesitantly took Hermione's hands in his. She did not object.

Encouraged, Severus continued, 'There are no Horcruxes for the Dark Lord to fall back on. His fight with Potter weakened him more than he will admit; he will never be this vulnerable again.' Severus released her hands, picked up the bottle and held it out towards her. 'You would only have to suffer my attentions the once, Hermione, but you must be a willing party for this to work. Will you consent to it?'

Hermione took the bottle from him and stared at it thoughtfully. 'And afterwards? How would you use this power?'

'Only for good.' Severus smirked. *My good.*