

The Veil

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Morior

Chapter 1 of 1

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Over the course of the last few years of her life, Hermione Granger had allotted a good deal of time to contemplating death. It wasn't that she had been feeling particularly morbid over the past few years, just that she'd been one of the centerpieces in a war against the Darkest wizard of the age. She hadn't just contemplated her own death, either; she'd worried about Harry and Ron and Ginny and Fred and George and all the rest of the Weasleys and the Order. She had come to a few conclusions: between herself and Harry, they'd agreed that to be skinned alive and then drowned in lemon juice would be the most painful way to go, particularly if the Cruciatus was cast as one was submerged in the citrus. Harry had expressed the desire to go quickly, like his parents. A simple Avada Kedavra, a flash of green, then just dead. It was rather traumatizing for the survivors and witnesses, sure, but it wouldn't be so bad for the subject, considering the alternatives. Tortured to death, for instance, would be highly unpleasant. Surviving torture to be tortured another day was the contender in the argument of 'which is worse,' which she and Harry played often in those last months in the tent by themselves, after Ron had abandoned them.

In the end, Hermione could only observe that death was abrupt.

Hers had come upon her slowly, sure, but the actual dying had been sudden. One minute she was in more pain than she'd ever been in, the feeling that her very soul was straining to free itself from the bounds of her body simply to escape the torture. The bleeding, the burning, searing, stabbing.

They'd won the Battle of Hogwarts; Harry had defeated Voldemort in the Great Hall, gutting him with the Sword of Gryffindor while wearing the Sorting Hat on his head, looking ridiculous, but nobody cared. The Death Eaters had fled. Hermione had gone to the Shrieking Shack after to see if anything could be done about Ron and Professor Snape. Ron had been easy; she'd sealed his skin and reinnervated him, forced a Blood Replenishing Potion down his throat, and sent him on his way back to the Hogwarts grounds with a scowl. Snape had been more difficult, the wounds from the snake, which lay dead beside him, another victim to the Sword of Gryffindor, refusing to give over to her spells.

In the end, she'd stooped to Muggle means of medicine and stitched his neck shut magically, using sanitized thread from the raggedy Weasley sweater she wore. In her exhaustion and distraction, as he was coming around, she'd been attacked from behind.

Bellatrix Lestrange, who had disappeared from the Great Hall the moment it seemed her Dark Lord was going to fall, was in the Shrieking Shack. Hermione gasped, finding herself disarmed before she was able to do more than look over her shoulder. The blade of the knife was cold, sliding up under her rib cage into a lung. The act of breathing burned, every breath punctured the lung again on the knife in her ribs, but she couldn't stop gasping for air. The knife was removed, the witch standing over her smiling and watching. Hermione could feel warmth seeping out of her from the entrance wound, feel it pooling inside of her where the proper channels for flow had been disrupted by the blade.

She fell to the floor, hitting her head and seeing stars in addition to the spots from blood loss for a moment before her vision cleared enough that she could make out that

Professor Snape was conscious and watching, confused, unable to move because of the charms she'd put on him to keep him still earlier. She prayed they would lift quickly when she was dead so that he would be able to react, to get away from, maybe kill, Bellatrix.

Mad laughter met her ears, bringing Hermione's attention back to the maniac with the knife.

Again and again the knife entered her. For lack of anything better to do, Hermione counted. She was stabbed fifteen times in the gut after the initial stab to her lung. Then the spells began. The Cruciatus, of course, but not for long. There was the spell that pulled at her limbs, pulling her shoulders and elbows out of joint, bursting the fluid behind her kneecaps, cracking her pelvis. Her throat felt as though her vocal chords had been doused with acid, the screams tore through her so.

Smiling, Bellatrix took Hermione's left forearm and pressed her wand to the spot where the Dark Mark marred Death Eater flesh. For a terrified moment, Hermione was sure she was to be Marked, that there would be awful rumors spread about her after her death, that she had been a traitor. Instead, she gasped, unable to cry out any longer, when instead she was branded with a spell that felt as though a branding iron for cattle had been pressed to the soft flesh just below the bend at the inside of her elbow. The smell of burnt flesh made her want to retch, but she didn't have the energy, nor was she able to move so that she wouldn't choke on her own vomit.

"Look, Mudblood; now you have a Mark, too," Bellatrix said, holding the arm up so Hermione could see. The skin was bubbling into blisters from the heat, the skin red and pink where it wasn't entirely given over to open bloody flesh beneath, the edges charred black. Through the marred flesh, she could just make out the image of a skull, the curve of the cranium and eye sockets, the jagged edge of teeth; the only thing missing from it being a Dark Mark was the snake. She'd seen the brand before. It was Bellatrix's specialty, given to the Muggles she tortured on the Death Eaters' Muggle-baiting expeditions.

Then the witch left. She hadn't noticed that her old 'friend' was struggling for consciousness in his immobility. Hermione was thankful for that.

For awhile, she bled out. The pain was immense, dripping, draining. In the moments when she could detach herself from it, she could hear the struggling gurgle of her breath; it had a strange raspy quality that she figured was from her abused vocal chords. Her stomach felt bloated and full of holes all at once. Everything was very raw. While her limbs felt shattered and very, very cold, her torso seemed to be burning up as her blood pooled in the wounds and flowed out, soaking into her sweater and dripping to the floor, soaking her jeans as well.

Coherent thought was nonexistent. There was only the pain, the sensations surrounding the pain. She couldn't see anything, just splotches of color, flashes of memories of faces and places that she couldn't name.

She was brought back to her present situation when she finally gagged, reflexively trying to roll onto her side but only managing to increase the amount of pain she was in exponentially. She cried out, but that was a mistake. As she'd thought before, though before she'd thought she was going to vomit, the blood that had made its way up into her throat caught, and she but was unable to cough or even turn to get gravity to take care of the regurgitated fluids in her wind pipe.

Panicking, she forced her eyes to focus on the room around her. Professor Snape was watching her, a look of complete horror on his face, the rest of him immobile. She wished for a moment that she could thank him for all that he had done for her, because she was finally aware of it. She figured, though, that he deserved more than she could thank him for.

'Maybe the fact that he will live through this and I will die now will be enough,' she thought to herself, but the thought didn't make sense even as it stuck with her.

She couldn't breathe. There was no air getting to her around her own blood. Everything was cold. Even the blood pooling in her stomach seemed to be icy. The world wouldn't focus anymore; huge black spots speckled her vision, blocking things out entirely. Even the memories that had been popping up at random before stopped.

Quite suddenly, the pain was gone. It felt as though she was in a pool of water, but she didn't feel the need to breathe. She just felt cushioned, the water supporting what had previously been rioting pain in her joints. She still couldn't see, everything was a giant black spot. It didn't bother her, though; the simple fact that the pain was gone was enough to put her at ease.

There were whispers, unrecognizable, friendly voices surrounding her. A brush of fabric, light, almost wet to the touch though she did not get wet as she felt it swing behind her.

The curtain had fallen; it was finished.