

Live

by labrt2004

During Book 7, Harry Potter wasn't the only one who got stuck in some strange places...

One-Shot

Chapter 1 of 1

During Book 7, Harry Potter wasn't the only one who got stuck in some strange places...

Disclaimer: I do not own Harry Potter. JK Rowling owns the Potterverse. I'm just shamelessly feeding off of her. I make no money from my writing.

Summary: During Book 7, Harry Potter wasn't the only one who got stuck in some strange places...

Author's note: This is a short one-shot that I decided to write while taking a break from *Iridescent Snow*. Snarkyroxy and I exchanged prompts, and this is the result of Snarky's prompt. She requested a fic that featured Severus and Hermione, set in any time, involving a Horcrux. Thank you to Snarky for providing motivation to keep writing! Also, many thanks to her for betaing both this piece and *Iridescent Snow*.

Severus opens his eyes and takes in his surroundings. He lies perfectly still; his finely honed instincts for stealth keep him from displaying any indication of his wakefulness. Where is he? He certainly needs to figure that out before he dares to move. His eyes sweep around the... room? Enclosure? There is no way to tell what kind of location he is in, for all he sees, everywhere, is thick, white mist. He waits for somebody or something to appear. He can see the vapor swirling about slowly, tauntingly, as if daring him to expect more. Nothing comes. He does not know how long he waits. There is no way to ascertain passage of time in this strange, incomprehensible place.

He lets his eyes drift closed again as he attempts to recall what has happened to him. His mind is...he frowns to himself... not gone, just... inaccessible. Struggling through this unaccustomed moment of mental feebleness as he lies in the thick fog, he somehow *knows* that there is a perfectly good, and possibly monumentally important, reason that he is here. He mutters an oath, now relinquishing any pretense that someone else might be around to hear his words or detect his presence. He hasn't the slightest idea where he is, he has no means of remembering how he got there, and there is *definitely* no one else here who might enlighten him in this empty wasteland.

One after another, these revelations, each increasingly grimmer and more unpalatable, wash ashore from the sea of his consciousness, and he finally visits that last and most remote possibility, the one he has firmly pushed to the back of his mind.

Severus Snape is dead.

Was death meant to be like this? For all, or only for him? It was truly this abominable non-existence, with no indication of whether his demise had been dignified and purposeful, or merely an ignominious smiting of flesh? His... body... such as it is...he holds up one hand to his face and notes that it remains the same, quite familiar...is suddenly riddled with a sickening, cold feeling.

No, impossible.

And yet... he can produce no argument against what is clearly the inescapable truth.

Unbidden, the memories rush forward. Lily, with her hair of firespun red silk, her build so petite compared to Severus' own that when they were walking side by side along the shores of Hogwarts lake, he could sometimes surreptitiously look straight down onto the top of her head without her ever noticing. Will he at last see Lily again? Despair trickles through him as he realizes that no, there is no Lily here...there is no one here at all.

Dumbledore, where is he? Surely, the old man to whom Severus had entrusted his life for two decades, the eminent headmaster of Hogwarts who had all the prescience in the world, would have warned him that death would be like this! Severus recalls that terrible moment atop the Astronomy Tower, when, with body in riotous rebellion and mind in violent protest, he had raised his wand, stared with his own brokenness into the begging eyes of his mentor, and then turned the world upside down.

He had saved Lily's son. He had fulfilled Dumbledore's dying wish. And still, he finds himself *here*.

Severus takes stock of his surroundings once more. There are still only the lazy white plumes of mist, still the deafening silence. No ending or beginning, no past, no future. He simply... is.

Something in his chest clenches, and Severus labors to breathe. With shame...misplaced as it is in a world where only he exists...Severus fights the vise grip of his fear.

He does not want to be here. He can't spend the rest of his days like this...

"Professor Snape!"

Severus' eyes snapped open. He was no longer ensconced in the oblique layers of mist... but where was *how*? Before he had time to consider this question, however, he was accosted by an overwhelming, crushing pain in his neck. He realized with no small amount of alarm that he had a wound which was spurting blood. Instinctively, he reached for his wand.

There was no wand...where was his wand?

"Don't move!"

Adding to his ignorance of his location and his uncertainty of his own physical condition was now the unknown identity of a companion. Seeing through his watering eyes, he made out the form of...

No, that was simply absurd.

He turned his head with effort, inflicting yet more pain, but he needed to obtain a better view of his assailant.

"I *said*, don't move, Professor! You need to take this antidote."

"Granger?" he intended to bellow, though in his current state, it came out more like a croak.

"Yes," she answered through gritted teeth. "Stop talking and lie still."

A burst of apprehension shot through him. Granger was one of Potter's lackeys. They still believed...

Struggling anew, he gasped, "I did not kill..."

"I *know*, take this, Professor, *now*," she said urgently.

What did she mean, she knew? How could she know?

He opened his mouth to register yet more objections, only to have a potion dumped down his throat by the astonishingly efficient Granger.

Though anger instinctively flared throughout him, Severus was not foolish enough to fight. Resignedly, he lay as Granger cast a series of healing spells over his wound. The bleeding slowed to a tepid ooze, and Severus saw the girl exhale, a look of relief crossing her features. He tasted the burn left by the potion and immediately recognized one of his own creations.

For the first time in this whole bizarre sequence of events, Severus finally understood something. "Snake bite?" he murmured, more to himself than to her.

"Yes," she answered, voice hushed. She was now squatting next to him, mopping at her brow, a slightly disoriented look in her eyes. Dirt was in her hair, and she bore scratches and bruises on her face.

He frowned at her windswept, worn appearance. She had rushed here.

"*Nagini*," she breathed. "Voldemort's snake. One of the...horcruxes."

At last, Severus felt his brain resume normal function. A bite from the Dark Lord's familiar should have led to...

"I thought I had..." he began before abruptly cutting himself off.

He thought about the silent, mist-enshrouded place he had just come from. Had it all been merely a creation of delirium, a product of snake venom overtaking his mind? No, he decided. It had been too vivid, too substantial, to be a mere madness-induced dream.

"You thought you had what?" Granger asked.

"It is nothing," he said shortly. He remembered the untold amount of time spent living that unbearable existence. He would not speak of it. To speak of it would make it too... real.

He started to sit up, battling lightheadedness and nausea. "Potter? The Dark Lord?" he bit out, fearing the worst.

Before he knew what was taking place, Granger had slipped an arm underneath his back.

"Both still in the castle, somewhere... You mustn't attempt to get up! You're still very weak from the wound, and now the potion..."

Of course, the potion.

"No need to explain its side effects to me, Granger," he snarled, hating himself. Sure enough, he was now deprived of whatever meager strength he had possessed and was hanging over Granger's arm like a limp rag doll. To his surprise, she sat down upon the ground fully and shifted his weight so that he rested in her lap. The light was starting to dance before his eyes now, and the ceiling beams of the room...the Shrieking Shack, he recalled distantly...wavered as he looked up at them.

So this accursed war was not over yet. "I may still yet die," he whispered irrelevantly, as he felt the rise and fall of her chest against the side of his face. He made no attempt to put distance between himself and the girl. Perhaps that disturbing place he had come from had made him unhinged; he unreservedly sank further into her arms, experiencing inexplicable relief. He did not want to be back there, in that godforsaken place again.

"No, like hell you will!" she spat with such force that he somehow found the wherewithal to focus his eyes. To the shock of his addled brain, he saw that there were tears pooled in her eyes. And a look... in a sure testament that he was losing his wits, if not his life...he was certain that he had only seen that expression on one person only, a person long dead...

"You'll live, damn you, Snape, I didn't run all the way back and risk my neck like an idiot just to have you die!"

"Back...?" he echoed.

"Yes! Don't you remember? Voldemort set loose that... monster on you. He murdered you because he believed you were in possession of the Elder wand! And then Harry came out from underneath his Invisibility Cloak, and you...you dispensed memories."

Memories? What memories? Severus shook his head, frustrated that he could not remember.

"Harry took them... he went to Dumbledore's...your...office to look at them. He was rather upset, and I followed him, but I waited at the bottom of the staircase."

"Potter saw my memories?" Severus spluttered, appalled. "Why would I..."

"He had this horrible, stony expression on his face when he came back down," Granger barged on, unheeding of his protests. "I called out to him, but he walked straight past me... I saw that the office was still open." She shrugged. "So I went up, and I looked into the Pensieve, too."

At this, Severus groaned. Whatever had been in that Pensieve, he was sure he didn't want either Potter or Granger rifling through it.

"I am sorry, Professor. I had thought you were dead at that time," she said softly.

The sincerity in her eyes was painful to him at the moment, and he averted his gaze. "You have still not furnished a satisfactory answer to the question of why I am not," he reminded her, voice subdued.

"Well, I knew everything, I finally understood everything! I knew who you were, and I knew what truly happened with Professor Dumbledore, but most importantly, I knew how you felt towards... Harry's mother."

"Yes," Severus said, blankly. Now that he was aware what memories he had given, he found he was unexpectedly beyond caring that Granger had become privy to some of the most intimate facets of his life.

"Don't you see?" she whispered. "You *couldn't* have died. You made an oath to protect her son; you made sacrifices for Harry that were all your own. As her son's protector, you were also a beneficiary of her blood sacrifice. Or... at least I thought. Why not? I had to come... check."

Incredulous, Severus took in the fretting brown eyes, the unkempt and wild curls. Merlin save him. He was alive because of the lunatic postulates of a sixth-year witch? "I thank you," he said stiffly.

She leaned down, and he could feel her hair brush against his cheek. He was disturbed to find that she smelled distinctly of blood. His own? Hers? Grimly, Severus wondered what kind of carnage was being inflicted outside these walls at this very moment, what kind of horrors were laying siege to the castle. He had somehow been snatched from the jaws of a well-deserved death, but who would be left for him to return to?

Silently, their gazes met. With great care, she unfurled her arms from around him and placed him upon the ground again. She waved her wand, conjuring a pillow and blanket, which she proceeded to arrange about him. "I must go back. Voldemort is still here, Merlin knows where Harry is, half of Ron's family might be dead by now. This war... it is still happening."

Though her eyes remained determined, he heard the aching despair in her voice which mirrored his own. War had stolen her youth and visited untold hardships upon her in the same fashion that it had mercilessly consumed twenty years of his own life.

As she stood, he said, "He will live. But you must not reveal your knowledge in the Dark Lord's presence."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

Perhaps he still had this one last thing to give.

He closed his eyes. "There is a place," he said slowly. "I imagine it would be different for each individual. It can seem like death, but one can emerge from it." He opened his eyes again and found her frightened stare. "I never possessed the Elder wand. The headmaster was unarmed when I killed him."

She took this all in, blinking rapidly. "Then who...?" He watched as the knowledge dawned on her, and he nodded when she looked wondrously at him for confirmation.

No more, he vowed. He had given everything he had left.

"Go," he urged her. He knew that she could no longer be of use here.

She bent, and to Severus' consternation, placed a hand, still unroughened despite the war, upon his cheek. "I must leave you here for now, Professor Snape. It's too dangerous outside for me to transport you, and nobody else knows... about you. Rest and regain your strength, then try and get away. It'll help that everyone thinks you're dead." He felt himself pinned by the intense honey-brown of her imploring eyes. "I'll come back here, if I can, if...*when* all this is over. But if I don't, you need to live."

Severus opened his mouth to respond, but found that no appropriate words were forthcoming. Carefully, he wrapped his own fingers around the hand which rested on his cheek and gently removed it from himself, nudging her slightly away. The warm spot where it had lain remained, causing his heartbeat to hitch. "There is little time left, Miss Granger."

Her expression was anguished. "*Live*," she commanded fiercely.

Then he felt a Disillusionment Charm cast upon him before she Apparated out of sight.

Fin

Reviews are very much appreciated!

Coming soon: Stay tuned! Be sure to also check out what Snarkyroxy has got up her sleeve for the... slightly weird challenge that I sent her :)