

The Cruelty of Irony

by DarkFate

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Many thanks to my wonderful beta, AmyLouise!

Soft music filtered hauntingly through the hall. The languorous melody soothed the aching heart and yet left a bittersweet taste of longing. He prided himself on being impervious to such feelings of loss, but even he could not help but feel the sorrow of losing someone so dear. When Lily died, he thought that was the greatest pain he would ever feel. That feeling paled in comparison to the emptiness he felt now.

Wrong there was no other word for it.

She did not deserve death, least of all while he survived. He always believed that when the end came, he would be left for dead, forgotten and alone on the battlefield. By some miracle, he had survived, though now he wished he hadn't. The only reason he wanted to live through the war was for *her*; but she wasn't supposed to die! He knew it was a childish, immature thought, but he could not fathom how such a horrendous conclusion had come about. He was not so naïve as to believe she would not be in harm's way, but for all his cynicism, he had refused to consider the possibility of her untimely death. Yet here he stood, swathed in black, standing before a crowd of mourners, trying to find the words to ease their aching hearts; to speak of her unyielding kindness and love, to remember her subtle beauty. He who always had a dry, sarcastic remark on the tip of his tongue, who was always getting the last word, suddenly found himself inexplicably speechless. For how could words do justice to such a remarkable witch? For the first time in his life, he was having difficulty maintaining his stern severity; he seemed unable to maintain the distanced air that he always projected. He stared out at all the tearstained faces and felt a cruel sense of irony in the situation. Here he was, the outcast of the Wizarding world, standing before all the hailed heroes, giving the eulogy for their beloved lost star. It felt surreal, as though he were simply watching from a Pensieve as the events unfolded before his eyes. He realized that he would have to start speaking eventually, and so he began, quiet and reverent, as he spoke of the one woman he had truly loved.

"Everyone in this room knew this remarkable woman in a different and unique way. We all met her under different circumstances, and it is likely our initial opinions and perceptions of her varied. Yet in one way we are all united; we have all come to see this witch for the brilliant woman that she was. There is little I could say that you do not already know. She fought valiantly and loved freely. Her heart knew no bounds as she fought for the deserving and even the unworthy. She was a gift to us, a blessing in her intellect and kindness. She devoted her life to freeing the world from evil, and her sacrifice was not in vain. I stand before you in a new era of peace and freedom, a new world that she too should have enjoyed. There are no words for the injustice of such loss. Take comfort in the knowledge that she will not be forgotten, that she will be loved and missed, and the void that remains where she once was will never fade, but *will* ease with the passing of time."

Giving a small bow, he turned and walked stiffly from the front of the hall to take his place amongst her loved ones. He did not have the strength to so much as utter her

name when he had stood before them. He knew without a doubt that to say her name would be too much for him, it would make it too real, force him to accept the unacceptable truth. One by one her friends stood, each saying a few words about the woman they all loved, yet he did not hear the words. He looked, but did not see. In his mind's eye, all he could see was the bloodied grass and her crumpled figure amidst the havoc of the battle. He could still smell the metallic stench of death, the mixture of blood and sweat.

Around him people were standing; the service must be over. He too stood, unsure of where to go or to whom to turn.

"Coming, Daddy?"

Severus turned upon hearing the small voice. He looked down at the tiny head of black curls and sighed.

"Yes, Malia," he replied tiredly, running his hand lightly through her curls.

She looked up at him and it startled him for a moment. She gazed up at him with her eyes. It was almost too much for him, but before he could allow himself to succumb to the pain, he hoisted the little girl up into his arms. She giggled quietly, resting her head against his shoulder as her small arms wrapped around his neck.

He never imagined living to see a free world, let alone having a child. Yet here was this sweet little girl, who was undoubtedly his. It was no secret that he had little tolerance for children, but this child, *his* child, was the reason he could envision a future for himself. This poor child would never know the love and kindness of her mother. How could he raise a child alone? He hardly had the right to live, for all the sins he had committed in his life, so how could he do justice to this sweet girl? Her mother was the nurturing, openly affectionate one. He, on the other hand, was stern to a fault, often cold and harsh in his manner. What would be the fate of this child if left in his care?

All these thoughts ran rampant in his mind as he made his way to his rooms. By the time he entered the sitting room, Malia was already fast asleep in his arms. No doubt the drama of the day had tired her out. He carefully changed her into her pyjamas and tucked her into bed. He stood in her doorway watching her sleep as yet another wave of sorrow surged over him. Tiredly, he ran a hand over his face before quietly shutting the door and making his way over to the liquor cabinet. If there was ever a night he needed to indulge in the liquid poison, it was tonight. He was aware that he should probably be at the reception to accept condolences from the many guests that were present at the funeral. He felt no desire, however, to stand idly and listen as others recounted stories of his wife, of her adventures, her kindness, her life. They would understand. They would not begrudge him his solitude not today, not on the day he buried his beloved wife.

Slumping into his chair, he closed his eyes in exhaustion, only to be tortured by his mind as the image of her smiling face swam into view. A visage he knew he would never again see with his own eyes. How he longed to hear her tinkling laugh one last time! Alas, he could not; the fates had seen to that. Such cruel irony, that he should survive against all the odds, while she who had everything in her favour in terms of survival, did not. Granted, she was not the only casualty of the war, yet it was her death that resonated the most with the public as well as the Order. Perhaps it was because she was so very well loved and known. The gossip about her in the earlier days of her schooling had dissolved into insignificance.

The same could not be said about his reputation, for to this day, even with the tragedy he had so recently suffered, he could find no redemption in the eyes of the public. Thankfully, he was not inclined to care what others thought of him. Though perhaps now he should... It would not be only he who would suffer slights from the public; Malia too would be forced into isolation. He could only hope the Wizarding world would look upon her as her mother's daughter rather than his child and spare her the cruelties of society's neglect. Yet should they choose to shun her anyway, he would protect her, no matter the cost. No one would ever harm her while he lived and breathed... it was the least he could do for her. Perhaps his protection could compensate for his lack of skill as a parent. The likelihood of him being a good father was slim, in his view. He hardly had a role model in his own father.

He was pulled from his musings by the sound of soft crying. *Malia*, he thought sadly. She was young, but not too young... she still understood that her mother was never coming home. Sighing once more, Severus raised himself from his seat and quietly entered his daughter's room.

She was still asleep, her small form quivering as she cried pitifully. Carefully, he approached her bed, gazing at her with a sense of helplessness. If there was one thing Severus Snape was not, it was helpless, yet as he watched his young daughter weep in her sleep, he could not feel otherwise. Carefully he wrapped the sheets around her as he lifted her into his arms. Perhaps it would do them both some good if she slept in his rooms, perhaps it would help ease the sense of loneliness that had descended upon him since arriving in his empty quarters. Entering his no, *their* bedroom, he laid Malia onto the bed before going to change. By the time he returned, even more tears had leaked from her tightly shut eyes.

He gathered the small child in his arms, letting her snuggle close to him. Perhaps it would help ease both of their aching hearts, if only for a moment. Severus soon fell into a fitful sleep, haunted by images of his dead wife, the battle, and dreams of the life they should have had.

Thanks for reading, leave a review please!