

# Beautiful Bird

*by sshg316*

Even the bravest of men can be brought to his knees, especially when faced with his worst nightmare.

## Chapter One

*Chapter 1 of 4*

Even the bravest of men can be brought to his knees, especially when faced with his worst nightmare.

She stood at the door of the old, run-down house, her hand poised to knock, when it was flung open. The tall, dark-haired man reached for her, ushering her inside, his eyes looking over her shoulder, scanning the deserted street.

"Come inside, quickly. Were you followed?"

The woman shook her head. "No, I'm certain of it."

He nodded and turned, moving towards the kitchen. "We must hurry. There is little time."

She scurried behind him, not bothering to remove her cloak as she followed him up a narrow staircase to a small room on the first floor.

Silently, she entered.

\*

"When did it begin?" he asked as he removed his cufflinks and rolled his sleeves to his elbows.

She tried to remain calm but could not hide the tremor in her voice. "This afternoon, after tea."

"Symptoms?"

"Fever, irritability, stomach pains... and then I noticed the rash."

The man's head whipped up, his expression clearly alarmed. "A rash? Describe it."

"Patches of raised, white welts, surrounded by red."

The man held out his arms, but she hesitated. It wasn't that she didn't trust him—she just didn't want to let go.

"Hermione," Snape said calmly. "Please."

She opened her cloak.

\*

She hummed unevenly as he worked, tears silently trailing down her cheeks. Guilt and terror warred for dominance in her belly. She shook her head, the discordant lullaby never ceasing; she had to remain strong.

A tiny whimper caused her heart to skip a beat, and the melody broke as a sob escaped her throat. Little fingers wrapped around hers and clung, and she released a shuddering breath. She looked to Snape, a glimmer of hope shining in her eyes.

He appeared haggard, as if he had been dragged behind a stampeding Hippogriff. Slowly raising his head, he rasped, "Tea."

\*

He was attempting to keep her occupied, and she didn't like it. It worried her. With shaking hands, she removed her cloak, tossing it over the back of a kitchen chair. She heated the water with an angry wave of her wand, ignoring the Muggle stove for a more expedient method. He would notice that she hadn't made it 'properly'—he always did—but she didn't much care. She yanked open the cupboard and pulled out the tin of breakfast tea. She brewed, then steeped by rote, her mind completely focussed on the happenings in the small room above her.

\*

Teacup in hand, she made her way up the stairs. Hearing the velvet timbre of his voice, she paused outside the door to the little room, her irritation disappearing in an instant.

He was singing.

*Oh, hush thee, my baby,*

*Thy sire was a knight,*

*Thy mother a lady,*

*Both lovely and bright;*

*The woods and the glens,*

*From the towers which we see,*

*They all are belonging,*

*Dear baby, to thee.*

His long, pale fingers gently stroked the smattering of red curls on the small, round head that rested against his shoulder, and after a shuddered sigh... silence.

\*

"Drink," she murmured, hoping that he wouldn't notice the tears on her cheeks. She held out the cup of tea, but he shook his head.

"I'd like to hold her for a while, if that's all right."

Pain lanced through her heart, and she nodded, placing the teacup on the bedside table.

"Will she be all right?" she asked, bracing in preparation for whatever news he was about to impart.

"I believe so."

Relieved, she sank to the floor and asked, "Was it the potion?"

"An allergic reaction." He looked at her with pain-filled eyes.

"Hermione, what have we done?"

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*A/N: Snape was singing Scottish Lullaby (Lullaby of an Infant Chief). Clues and hints abound. ;)*

*This drabble series is complete in four parts, so I'll be posting it throughout the week.*

*Thanks to DeeMichelle and AnnieTalbot for looking these over.*

## Chapter Two

*Chapter 2 of 4*

Even the bravest of men can be brought to his knees, especially when faced with his worst nightmare.

"We didn't know. It wasn't supposed to be this way."

He refused to hear her words, instead returning his attention to the small child resting so securely against his chest. Hermione leaned her head against the mattress and closed her eyes, hoping for few moments' respite.

The babe whimpered softly, and Hermione's heart ached as she listened to his whispered reassurances.

When the child had calmed, Snape murmured quietly, "The potion must be purged completely from her system before you can leave."

Her hands clenched into fists in her lap; leaving was not something she wanted to consider.

Not yet.

\*

He continued to soothe the little one, the longing in his eyes causing new cracks in Hermione's already breaking resolve.

"Maybe this was a sign... maybe we should—"

His denial came before she could finish. "No. We cannot."

Frustrated, she asked, "Then what do you propose we do?"

"There are spells—"

"You would use Dark magic? On your own child?"

His angry gaze snapped to hers. "She is not mine!" he asserted, even as he held the baby tighter in his arms.

The child stirred, and his eyes softened as he looked at her. "I wish she were."

\*

She stiffened at his words. "Don't say such things." Her voice broke. "You can't... you mustn't think that way."

He would not meet her gaze, and that alone told Hermione volumes.

"I was able to counteract the allergic reaction. She will need to see a Healer—it could be one of the more commonly used ingredients. The fluxweed, perhaps, or knotgrass. It's possible the Boomslang skin was—"

She placed a hand on his knee. "Severus, stop. I'll take her to St Mungo's as soon as possible. In the meantime, Evelyn—"

His expression hardened. "What did you call her?"

\*

Hermione winced as she realised her mistake—she had broken their agreement. "I'm sorry, Severus. *Rose* will be fine. You've taken excellent care of her."

"It is my fault this happened."

She sighed, knowing that any assurances she spoke would go unheeded. Instead, she watched him as he held her precious daughter and wished that things could be different for them. Her eyes filled with tears yet again as he examined the baby thoroughly. He hadn't seen her in several weeks, and she looked so different now...

"She takes after Mr Weasley, it appears."

She bristled at his bitter declaration.

\*

They sat in heavy silence. Hermione closed her eyes; visions of what could have been played behind her eyelids, taunting her with scenes of laughter, love... and freedom. Despite their circumstances, she believed it could still happen for them... someday.

"Forgive me," he murmured.

She glanced at him briefly, the sting of his previous words still clearly felt.

"I should not have spoken of him. It's unfair to you, and I apologise."

She nodded, too drained to hold on to her anger.

The baby began to fuss, and Hermione, knowing what was needed, reached for her. Snape recoiled.

"No, please."

\*

"Severus," she said soothingly, aching at the evidence of what they had done. "She's hungry, and I need to feed her. When she's finished, you may hold her again. All right?"

He flushed in embarrassment, and after Hermione had risen to her feet, he awkwardly placed the child in her arms. He excused himself and left the room, granting them their privacy. An hour had passed before he returned with a carved, wooden cradle.

"From when I was an infant," he explained, his face void of emotion. "I thought perhaps..." He motioned toward the baby.

Hermione smiled sadly. "It's perfect."

\*

The baby slept peacefully in the cradle, and Severus reached out a hand to touch her brow. His posture slumped... whether in relief or disappointment, she did not know.

"The fever has broken."

Hermione smiled but could only nod in reply, she was so exhausted. With her daughter out of immediate danger, she curled up on the bed and fell asleep. Snape soon followed.

A shrill cry rent the air, jolting them from slumber.

Frightened, they rushed to the cradle. With hands swift but gentle, he pulled back the blanket and examined the baby.

"The potion... the purge is complete."

\*

They could only watch as the freckled skin seemed to ripple, paling until it resembled the finest porcelain. She squirmed at the odd sensations and then opened her eyes. Black irises glittered at them as her fiery whirls of hair darkened to the deepest ebony.

Then, she smiled.

Snape gasped for breath, his face twisting in agony. A low moan escaped his lips as he fell to his knees beside the cradle. Hermione, buckling under the weight of his despair, could only sob as he clutched the child to his chest, his anguished groans interspersed with a single word:

"Evelyn."

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*A/N: And things begin to become clear... sort of. ;)*

*Thank you to DeeMichelle and AnnieTalbot for looking these over!*

## Chapter Three

*Chapter 3 of 4*

Even the bravest of men can be brought to his knees, especially when faced with his worst nightmare.

His face was pressed against her stomach, his body trembling. She could do nothing but hold him. Despite the circumstances, she relished the feel of him; it had been too long. Dropping her head, she gently kissed his temple, sighing when he flinched at the contact. As soon as his emotions were again in check, he immediately left her, rising before walking across the room to the window. Saddened, she rose to her feet and then moved toward the door.

"Where are you going?" he whispered, his voice hoarse with his despondency.

"To inform the others."

He gave no reply.

\*

She quietly made her way downstairs to the study. She was well aware that he would not be pleased with what she was about to do, but there was no other choice. They were out of options, and it was time—past time, in her opinion—to ask for help when help was needed.

Finding a quill and piece of parchment, she hastily scrawled a message, then replicated the missive several times.

*The bird fell ill. The raven has broken. Come quickly. The fire is lit.*

She watched from the window as the tawny owl took flight. "Godspeed," she whispered.

\*

The fireplace glowed a brilliant green several times that night, until Snape's small sitting room was filled with people. Hermione's heart swelled at the manifestation of such love and loyalty. Truer friends had never been than these.

The visitors whispered amongst themselves as they awaited the final two of their number. The fireplace burst into an emerald blaze, and from the flames emerged Harry, followed closely by Ron.

The ginger-haired wizard searched the crowded room with wild eyes. "Where is Rose? Is she all right?"

Though no one heard Snape enter, his voice was unmistakable. "My daughter's name is Evelyn."

\*

Hermione's heart quickened at the venomous glares that were being exchanged between the temperamental wizards.

"Does that mean you're claiming her now?" Ron asked with a knowing smirk.

Snape merely scowled as he quickly glanced about the room.

Ron snorted, folding his arms across his chest. "Yeah, that's what I thought."

"You know nothing, Weasley," Snape snarled, his expression thunderous. "I will do whatever it takes to protect what is mine."

"Everything but fight for them," Ron said dismissively.

"Stop it," Hermione snapped, reining things in before they got out of hand. "I didn't ask you here to bait Severus."

\*

"Why are we here... exactly?" Arthur asked quietly, his arm wrapped around the shoulders of a visibly shaken Molly.

Hermione glanced at Snape. "She's had an allergic reaction to the potion."

Minerva gasped, her hand covering her mouth.

"She's fine," Hermione assured. "It was frightening, but Severus took excellent care of her. However, she can no longer take the potion. We must decide what to do now."

Snape's dark eyes glittered dangerously as he spat, "There is nothing to discuss. There is only one option left available to us."

"No!" Hermione shook with anger. "Dark magic is *not* an option."

\*

"Dark magic?" Ginny asked, worry etched across her face.

"He wants to use a spell, one that would alter Evelyn's DNA... permanently," Hermione answered flatly, casting a withering glance at Snape. "I won't allow it."

"Damn it, Hermione!" Snape roared as he spun to face her. "We must do something! This is the only way..."

Her eyes softened, and she walked to him, placing a hand on his arm. "Not the only way."

Snape fisted his hands in his hair. "I must protect her. If we do this, she'll be safe."

"She needs more than your protection—she needs *you*."

\*

Harry cleared his throat. "Perhaps we should put out the call to Dumbledore's Army. They'd all be willing to help, and we know they're well-trained. They'd do anything for Hermione... and you, as well, sir."

But Snape was already shaking his head. "No. It's too dangerous for that many people to know."

"Severus," Molly said gently, pulling something from her ever-present knitting bag. "You of all people should know that people see what they choose to see. You're making this more complicated than it needs to be." With a knowing look, she pressed a small, knitted cap into his hand.

\*

Snape stared at the tiny pink hat, his face blank.

"We are stronger together than apart," Hermione pressed. "If you continue to push us away, you let him destroy us. Please, we miss you, and Evelyn needs her father. *I* need you." She wiped away an errant tear.

For the first time in months, Snape reached for her, pulling her into a tight embrace.

Minerva's soft brogue broke the silence. "It was a good plan, but none of us expected it to go on for so long. This situation is intolerable... for all three of you. Let us help you."

\*

"You must decide quickly, Severus," Arthur urged. "We must act tonight."

Hermione felt him stiffen at the reminder. She whispered so only he could hear, "I agreed to your plan because I trust you. Isn't it time you afforded me the same courtesy?" His arms tightened, and she swore she could almost hear him thinking. "We can protect Evelyn... together. Will you let them help?"

After a long moment, she felt the slight jerk of his head.

She looked to Harry. "Do it. Contact Dumbledore's Army."

A whimpering cry was suddenly heard from upstairs, and Severus rushed from the room.

\*

Ron was immediately at Hermione's side. "What's he doing? What if he casts the spell?"

"Hush now. Listen," Molly said, her mouth curving into a slow smile as she trained her gaze at the ceiling. All talking ceased as they strained to hear the gentle singing drifting down from above them.

*...Oh, fear not the bugle,*

*Tho' loudly it blows,*

*It calls but the warders*

*That guard thy repose;*

*Their bows would be bended,*

*Their blades would be red,*

*Ere the step of a foeman*

*Draws near to thy bed.*

*Oh, hush thee, my baby,*

*Thy sire was a knight..*

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A/N: More pieces fall into place. All the answers will be in the final installment, which I will post tomorrow.

Thank you to DeeMichelle and Subversa for looking this set over!

# Chapter Four

Chapter 4 of 4

Even the bravest of men can be brought to his knees, especially when faced with his worst nightmare.

Hermione entered the upstairs bedroom with a relieved yet heavy heart. Evelyn lay bundled in her cradle, her dear little face free of care as she peacefully slumbered. Her gaze then slid to where Snape stood by the small, dingy window, his head bowed, a worn bit of parchment clutched in one hand.

On silent feet, she cautiously approached the mercurial wizard, unsure of her welcome after the evening's events. As if he sensed her presence—and her reticence—he turned, his eyes glittering in the candlelight. Without a word, he opened his arms, and she fell into his embrace.

\*

Lying side by side, he had held her tightly, whispering words of contrition and regret, until his exhaustion had overcome him. Gently, so as not to wake him, Hermione loosened his grip on the parchment, pulling it free of his fisted hand; then she read again the terrible words that had struck terror into Snape's heart.

*Congratulations, my traitorous friend. I've heard rumours that you are to be married, and to such a tasty morsel, too. I cannot wait until the day you have a child. You know how I like kids—yours would be my favourite, I promise you...*

\*

Hermione shuddered, burrowing closer to Snape's side. Of their own accord, her fingers lovingly reached out to ease the deep, ever present furrow between his brows.

He had thought only to protect her and their unborn child, but even so, she had been terribly hurt by his decision to cancel their wedding and pretend that the baby was Ron's. She had borne the pain, however, believing that the situation would be resolved prior to their child's birth.

She had been wrong.

The terrible deception had continued, his fear for his daughter—his only flesh and blood—outweighing all other considerations.

\*

The house was abuzz with activity; Dumbledore's Army had arrived. Assignments were being given for patrolling the neighbourhood, as well as guarding the house and its inhabitants.

Snape sat in a high-backed chair, watching soberly.

Sensing his distress, she went to him, placing a hand upon his shoulder.

"Severus?"

After a long moment, he replied, "I am her father. It is my family who is threatened, and yet I have chosen to hide, like the snake that I am."

She opened her mouth to deny his words, when he rose to his feet.

"No more. It is time to strike."

\*

She waited in the sitting room, a fussing Evelyn held to her breast. She feared for her lover's safety and that of her friends. Snape, Ron, and Harry had spent weeks perfecting the plan that would put a final end to the threat to her child.

Now, it had begun.

After glancing out the window at the full moon, she closed her eyes and offered a prayer for her loved ones.

Her beautiful bird squirmed in her arms. "Shh, your papa will come soon."

And through her tears, she sang:

*Oh, hush thee, my baby,*

*Thy sire was a knight...*

\*

He returned with the others the following morning, bloodied, battered, and with new battle scars—but these, she knew, he would bear proudly. Wrapped in her embrace, he told her how the bait had been taken, how he'd been surprised by how haggard, how old the animal who had driven such fear into their hearts had appeared. Even so, when cornered, the beast had attacked, and none had escaped unscathed.

"Any bitten?" she asked, fearing his reply.

"A few scratches—nothing more."

Overcome with relief, she wept in his arms as he whispered over and over again, "She's finally safe."

\*

Snape stood before the fireplace, relishing its warmth. From his pocket, he removed the bit of parchment that had been his constant companion since the moment it had been delivered, a reminder of all that he'd stood to lose. For too long, he'd let his fear overrule his judgement, and his family had suffered for it.

Never again.

Without a thought, he tossed the parchment into the fire, watching until all that remained were ashes. Fenrir Greyback would never threaten another child.

Hearing the sounds of mother and child in the room above, he smiled and then joined his family.

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A/N: And that's the end! I hope you enjoyed the conclusion. If you're still confused (hopefully you're not), then feel free to ask questions. :)

According to the name dictionary I used, Eileen is the Irish equivalent of Evelyn, and both names, of course, mean "beautiful bird." (According to some other dictionaries, they mean "life" or "living", but obviously I went with this version!)

In the letter to Snape, I took from a line in chapter 27 of HBP, where Greyback says, "But you know how much I like kids, Dumbledore." Snape had a very real fear of werewolves—thanks to his experience as a teenager—and Greyback was known for contaminating children. He would have been aware of Greyback's proclivity to infect children, and I can only imagine the terror he would have felt at the threat to his own child.