

A Solitary Path

by *windwings*

He knows his time is drawing near.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: This story was written for Snape_LDWS comm. The prompts was 'hearing', and the drabble had to be inspired by a song. My inspiration came from Green Carnation's 9-29-045. I'd like to thank my wonderful beta, **melusin**.

I won the round with this one. :)

~o~

He was forced to acknowledge the signs when one day, instead of a lithe doe, his wand spurted gray vapours. Deep in his heart, he'd already known for some time. They were beckoning him in his dreams, the heralds of the end. Dumbledore, sage and serene, and Lily, her silver-bell-like laughter ringing in his ears for hours after he awoke. Sometimes, he even saw his mother, shying away after bestowing a sad, knowing smile upon him. All the dead faces, standing vigil over his bed at night, watching, waiting—for now it was clear as day: Severus Snape's days were numbered.

Now that he didn't have to look into Potter's eyes—*her eyes*—on a daily basis, and his journey's end was near, the odd mixture of loneliness and tenacious wish to *live* came crashing down like an avalanche. Each time he overheard Minerva joke sadly about her joints with a humorous self-deprecation of someone admitting a passage-of-time condition, he craved to live long enough to see his joints give. But March thawed and passed, and April was blooming, and Severus Snape was going to die.

He looked out the tall lancet window at the spring booming outside. Scents of jasmine and first roses, nightingales singing; everything in Nature clashed so vibrantly and heedlessly with the course his life had taken.

A faint shuffle of feet disturbed his musings. Snape whipped around and saw Longbottom, creeping stealthily through the corridor. He was carrying someone: a student, young one.

He appeared before the boy, sudden and immediate, as always.

"I realize that enjoying more cerebral pastimes than skipping around with—" Snape held his tongue, noticing the violent tremors wrecking the girl's body. He recognized the signs.

"They put her under *Cruciatus*, *Headmaster*. She's only fourteen," Longbottom seethed, and Snape knew that if the boy's hands hadn't been occupied, his wand would be sticking into his throat right now.

Dropping the façade, he summoned a vial from his personal stock and, discarding Longbottom's protests, took the little body from his arms.

"Hot baths with shea oil will take the edge off the immediate effects. Have Mr. Fillian check out *Amelioras* from the library. Page fourteen. He's a capable brewer. Keep a

running supply of this. And for gods' sake, have them report to their detentions with Hagrid. This is what not doing it leads to."

When Snape raised his eyes to see if anything had registered in Longbottom's fear-addled brain, he was swept away with a look of admiration and dawning understanding.

Slowly, the astounded boy stretched out a hand. The Headmaster took it with no qualms. It might have been the last heartfelt gesture in his life, and for a few glorious moments he was not alone. He reveled in it.

A glance Neville stole at the recovering girl was enough for him.

"Obliviate."

He was careful to spare the important information.

There were only a few steps left on his journey. It was a solitary path.