

Hugging Severus

by Memory

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Chapter 1 of 1

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A story inspired by my colleague Simona, who is a younger sister, a good friend and an expert hugger. And who always laughs when she hugs me, and I – miserably - stiffen.

Disclaimer: This is a non-profit tribute to the works of JK Rowling, who created and, together with her publishers and licensees, owns the characters and settings elaborated herein. All my gratitude to my previewers **Duj** and **Tearsofphoenix** and to my beta **AmyLouise**. Many thanks to my kind readers and reviewers.

HUGGING SEVERUS

When she touches him, Severus stiffens.

He can't help such a reaction. Hugs have always made him feel vulnerable, and Severus remembers each one of them.

He experienced so few!

The first hug Severus can recall had been the starting point; the evidence that imprinted his childish mind with the truth of the following statement *No good thing comes without exacting a reward, and a painful one at that.*

Kneeling on the floor, his mother is holding him in the circle of her arms. Never has Severus felt so delightfully safe; never has he enjoyed so vividly the warmth that love can spread in the most common, ordinary actions. He is lingering in her embrace—not asking; not being asked—when a strong hand pulls him rudely back.

"Hey, son, what's the matter with you?"

His father is there, towering over the two smaller figures wrapped one in the other. Severus is disconcerted; what wrong did he do this time? He knows that his father is never pleased with him, but this time... This time he can't really see why. Aren't his friends hugged by their mothers? Why can't Severus be?

"Well, woman, are you going to make the boy a sissy like all those of your kind? A bit of foolish wand waving, and everything is OK for them, isn't it? I bet they wouldn't know what to do without that stick. Useless cowards."

Severus is staring agape, his lower lip trembling. His mother is slowly rising, and her face is taking on a stubborn, rebellious expression. But she doesn't reply. She just watches the man in front of her, and her lips tighten.

He waves his hand dismissively at her, then he adds sarcastically, "Go on, go on, make the boy a crybaby. I have already been told that he's a whiner. A spoiled brat."

With a sudden move, the man pushes Severus so hard that he falls on the ground.

"You really are your mother's son, not mine. Same race. A bunch of useless freaks."

The second hug brings contrasting feelings to his memory.

First year, end of the term. Severus is in the train station, silently waiting to go home. Lily is waiting with him, but she chats animatedly, happy as she is to see her family again after all those months in Hogwarts. How many things she will have to tell them!

Severus wordlessly envies her. Her parents will be excited to hear about her studies while he... Nobody will ask him anything—his father because he despises the wizarding world; his mother because she is too disillusioned to start a fight.

But when the train enters the station, Lily makes an unexpected gesture and hugs him tightly. He stiffens, his body and spirit vibrating with an undefined emotion, his mind suddenly alarmed.

She immediately releases her arms and looks at him with an embarrassed face.

"See you at home, Sev. Thank you for your help."

His eyes widen in sad disappointment. Ah! So, she is not going to share his compartment, as she did when they—

A violent shove makes him stagger.

"Pay attention, Snivellus!" The hateful voice of Sirius Black mocks him while James Potter exclaims, "You are not going to stay with the Slytherins, are you, Evans? That would be unforgivable!"

Lily blushes and lowers her head. Yet Severus can see that she agrees. Her hug was meant to ask for his forgiveness, to let him understand that she had been forced to make that decision; but he perceives that she is relieved when she sees that he doesn't object.

And of course he doesn't object! He can't... He is too busy fighting back the tears to risk exposing his feelings and being mocked again.

The third hug... Oh, the third hug is an unbearable memory, something so painful, so desperately hurtful that he has tried to delete it from his mind... without result.

It's the evening in which Dumbledore has announced to him that James and Lily Potter had been killed. Severus' desperation is so immense that the old wizard seems to be moved and hugs him quickly; then, he makes a majestic exit and leaves the boy to a night of horror and a life of remorse.

That hug has cost Severus his soul, his future, his hopes, his freedom. But after all, he was willing to pay. So he doesn't complain. He only tries to remove that memory, but of course, it's impossible.

The fourth hug... Well, here his memories get confused. The snake had bitten cruelly, and the poison had burned in his veins. He had fallen on the ground... Harry Potter had unexpectedly appeared... no, not only Potter, but also his ever-present sidekicks, Weasley and Granger. As always, the girl had been much quicker than Potter to understand what Severus was offering... he was feeling so horrible... and hoped that his pain wouldn't be useless... his precious memories, his treasures... given so freely to the boy...

The girl is near his bed.

She smiles, and suddenly Severus feels safe. Her smile is so comforting, and it doesn't ask for anything in return. There are no hidden traps; no terrors waiting for him; no retaliation; no accusation; no blaming.

And yet, each time she touches him, he stiffens. He stiffens, and she smiles.

But she seems to understand. And soon he begins to need her.

He cannot speak, as the poison has injured his vocal cords. Soon they will be healed, Poppy assures him, but in the meantime, he must be absolutely quiet. No strain, or he will risk damaging them permanently.

So he speaks with his eyes. Each time she enters his room, his eyes call, speak, plead, offer, sing. And each time she tilts her head, as if listening to a mysterious conversation.

Little by little, he becomes used to her presence; even more, he becomes addicted. And how could he not? Every one of her gestures is a joy. Every one of her smiles is a promise.

Now Severus knows that the next time she hugs him, he isn't going to stiffen.

Actually, he can't wait for that day to happen.