

Take This Kiss Upon The Brow

by orm irian

What can a person do when all hope has flown away?

One shot

Chapter 1 of 1

What can a person do when all hope has flown away?

Author's note: This story is an 'answer' to Selinabl's ficlet, "Just A Dream". You absolutely need to read that in order to understand events in this story. It is beautiful, brief, and you can find it here: <http://www.thepetulantpoetess.com/viewstory.php?sid=17535> .

I don't own anything in the Potterverse, and I don't own Selinabl's plotline: I am just having fun with the characters. No money is being made and no copyright infringement is intended.

My sincere thanks to MsTree for a speedy and valuable beta read!

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He awoke to an unusual sense of contentment. He'd been with Lily last night: his one and only love—even if it *had* only been in his dreams. He delayed rising, wanting to hold onto the dreamy afterglow as long as possible, yet knowing he would have to let it go.

Indeed, when he emerged from the bedroom and saw that ridiculous child the Ministry had foisted on him, his happiness vanished like mist in the sun. There she sat, perched on his sofa, staring off into space like an empty-headed idiot. "I'm going to breakfast," he snapped.

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The door slammed. Hermione roused briefly at the sound. *Should I go to the Great Hall?* she wondered, but the thought of food nauseated her. *He hates me. It's hopeless; I'll never be more than an unwanted encumbrance in his life.*

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As the week wound down, Severus realized he'd hardly seen his wife during the past few days. Was she avoiding him? Well, Saturday would be here before he knew it, and with it their forced compliance to the intimacy clause of that damnable law. He'd certainly see her then. Not that it's all bad, he mused. Sex, after all, was sex. And the physical release, at least, was welcome.

But when Saturday night arrived, his wife was nowhere to be found. He checked her bedroom, the library, and the castle grounds, and then waited in the sitting room for hours. At last, he decided to go to sleep. *SHE can pay the sodding fine!*

He awoke Sunday morning to find two missives on his bedside table. One bore the unmistakable seal of an official Ministry scroll. *No need to open that*, he thought resentfully, knowing it must contain a citation for their missed intercourse. He intended to drop it straight into his wife's lap. Picking up the second note, he broke the seal and a small vial rolled out. The note was in his wife's hand and said simply, 'For Severus.'

Severus examined the contents of the vial. It appeared to be a light blue liquid, but when he tipped it sideways, it swirled around itself in a curious fashion *Is it a vapor?* he wondered. *A memory possibly?* If so, it was like no memory he'd encountered in the past. Curious, he moved to his bureau, pulled out his Pensieve and unscrewed the vial's cap. Immediately, the vapor streamed upward, coalescing into an elongated mass. Gradually, it took on a human form — his wife's. It was not a memory, for it turned unerringly towards him and smiled.

"Hello, Severus."

"How did you...? What is this thing?"

She shook her head. "It doesn't matter, not anymore. All that matters are the words I need to say to you. I can say them now," she said wistfully. "Listen, Severus: I have loved you. I wish you well." She walked toward him and leaning in, pulled his head gently down, and kissed him on the forehead.

He felt only a cool brush against his skin, like a tactile whisper. Then she was gone.

He frowned in concentration. *What the hell was that?* Then her words registered: *I have loved you.* Past tense. Dropping the Pensieve, he ran to her bedroom and flung open the door. She hadn't even bothered to ward it.

She lay on the bed, still and cold, a slight smile lingering on her lips.

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Author's note: The title is from "A Dream Within A Dream," by the incomparable Edgar Allen Poe.

Take this kiss upon the brow!

And, in parting from you now,

Thus much let me avow —

You are not wrong, who deem

That my days have been a dream;

Yet if hope has flown away

In a night, or in a day,

In a vision, or in none,

Is it therefore the less gone?

All that we see or seem

Is but a dream within a dream.

I stand amid the roar

Of a surf-tormented shore,

And I hold within my hand

Grains of the golden sand —

How few! yet how they creep

Through my fingers to the deep,

While I weep — while I weep!

O God! Can I not grasp

Them with a tighter clasp?

O God! can I not save

One from the pitiless wave?

Is all that we see or seem

But a dream within a dream?