

I'll Be There For You

by themistresssnape

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Chapter 1 of 1

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He watched her closely from his vantage point in the shadows. He always stayed in the shadows, away from the senses she had adapted. Her once keen cinnamon eyes were dull and listless now, forever staring into an unseen distance without really seeing anything. A simple curse, a resounding flash of white light, and the flickers of life and joy that were once in those eyes were gone. He couldn't bear to leave her like that, resigned to the fate of living with a curse that could not be reversed, and so he stayed with her.

Sometimes he thought she knew he was there. There were times when she would turn toward his position and appear to be listening—feeling—intently to the space he occupied. Perhaps she detected the scent of him, she may have even recognized it. Perhaps she could hear his breath, the rustle of his cloak, the grounding of his boots against her floors. Perhaps it was the fact that his scent was out of place in her home, it was a decidedly masculine and spicy smell in her femininely floral space. When she would give an indication that she sensed his presence, he would keep as still as possible and hold his breath in fear before she moved on.

He was diligent in his task, even amidst the fear that she would realize who he was and take his presence as something more than what it was. She had been possibly the most intelligent woman he'd ever met. There was little doubt in his mind that she was still intelligent, but she was different these days. It would have been odd if what happened to her hadn't made her different. It seemed as if her spirit had been broken when the curse took her sight. She went about her days in a never changing pattern that was as monotonous as it was predictable. She awoke every morning at seven to a bland breakfast of tea and toast. She washed the dishes by hand and sat by an open window, stroking her ginger cat until noon. Potter and Weasley would pop in with her lunch and stay for an hour or so, never noticing his scowling form in the background. Once they were gone, she listened to the wireless and drifted off for a nap. A hot dinner would be waiting on the table when she awoke. By nine, she was curled up in bed and sleeping soundly.

It was only when she was safely asleep that he felt it safe to leave. He only left her long enough to shower and change. Sometimes he was able to eat something or catch a few hours of sleep. He worried about her with every breath. His chest tightened at every thought of her. She never questioned where the breakfast or the dinner came from.

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She knew she was being watched, had sensed his presence since that first day in the Hogwarts infirmary. The effects of the curse had been devastating, and she had felt like dying as she lay there in the coolness of the castle. She had been nineteen then, a year out of school, and still in love with learning and life. She had wept that day when Madam Pomfrey told her that the loss of her sight was irreversible. She had wept for herself out of pity, for what she had lost, for the fact that she would never read any of her books again.

She was twenty-six now and had felt the presence every day. At first it was terrifying, knowing someone was so fixedly in her personal space and yet being comforted by

the thought of a companion. Not once in seven years had her companion spoken directly to her nor had they touched her. They stayed carefully hidden away from her, watching from a distance. As her senses became more acute, she noticed the scent of him (for her companion was definitely male), the heaviness of his breathing, and could pinpoint his presence no matter where he moved. Worst of all, she sensed something of disappointment in him... disappointment with her.

It was his scent that stirred some thought of recognition within the recesses of her mind. The heady combination of herbs, spices, and fresh soap overwhelmed her newly sensitive nose. Memories of billowing cloaks and sharp, biting words invaded her thoughts. The dawning of realization was a drunken feeling for her before the pain of the last seven years of his sacrifice welled up within her. She knew almost immediately that it was he who had her breakfast waiting on the table, who covered her with a blanket as she slept the afternoon away, who prepared her dinner. The tears welled up in her blank cinnamon eyes as the realization that he had spent the last seven years of his life with her while she had spent seven of hers despising him.

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He was there before she awoke that morning. Her tea and toast was ready and waiting on the kitchen table when she came in, her short brown curls damp from her shower. She felt her way to her chair and sank down upon it, the weight of her realization pushing against her lungs and making it hard to breathe.

"Jam," she muttered, moving to stand and cross to the refrigerator. There was a wave of his scent over her, the flutter of fabric against her body, the sounds of boots crossing the floor. The cool air from the refrigerator permeated the room as her companion stood in front of the open appliance.

Without thinking, he spoke. "Strawberry or Peach?" He held his breath when his brain caught up with his mouth. Seven years of carefully treading around her to prevent his presence becoming known, and he had given it all away in three words.

She smiled in his direction, letting the velvet of her companion's voice wrap around her. It sent a wave of warmth through her. "Strawberry," she said as if she were talking to Potter or Weasley.

He retrieved the jam she requested and carried it to the table, summoning a butter knife as he went. He covered her toast and pushed the plate toward her, the sound of porcelain on wood indicating that she could eat.

She smiled in his direction again, her unseeing cinnamon eyes fixed on his form. She reached across the table, her soft fingers tickling the air in search of his face. He sighed heavily, his warm breath washing across her palm as he moved closer. Her fingertips ran over his brow and cheeks, down the harsh bridge of his nose and over his soft lips. He smiled against her fingers and pressed a light kiss to them.

"Thank you, Severus," she whispered, feeling the tingle of his lips on her fingers. "For everything."

Severus Snape released a breath he didn't know he was holding at her words. There was no fear or revulsion in her tone. Only gratitude and peacefulness. The warmth of her smile radiated into his heart. Seven years had not been wasted. No, she sat across from him, her fingers still resting against his lips, thanking him for his presence in her life. Perhaps she would learn to become the woman he had known... in time.

He took her hand in his and held it tightly. "You're welcome, Hermione."

THE END

A/N: Unfortunately, they don't belong to me. I promise I'll return them no worse for wear when I'm finished. Enjoy, and please review! Love, ~themistresssnape

May 16th--I have been convinced to continue this one-shot in a longer story. It may be found under the name *Always*, and the first chapter should be up soon.