

Dark Waters

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Written for Jessica/forgettablelove who requested something angsty for the sshg_exchange, and hopefully likes what I produced.

Thanks go to my beta notsosaintly, for wonderful and fast work.

Disclaimer: I'm not JK Rowling, as such none of the characters are mine.

Chapter One - The Hunt

She propelled herself through the Forbidden Forest, feeling the low tree branches ripping at her clothing and skin. Magical creatures of all kinds screamed and dove at her, blinding her even more with the darkness of their wings.

Cries from behind made her throw herself even faster into the dark abyss. A flicker of light passed over her form, and she began to run, stumbling over decaying tree roots, feeling her blood mix with the mud that was coating her body.

Something grabbed her arm, and she wrenched her hand away, falling into nothingness, before she collided with her pursuer. She stepped back terrified, lifting her face to stare into his dark eyes.

A tall, dark-robed man towered over her, a torch burning in his hand. She stared at him in fear, watching the flames' light dance over his emotionless face.

He stretched his free hand out to reach her, but she cringed and retreated further. The brown-haired young woman drew her wand and with more bravery than she felt, addressed him: "Stay back, Professor Snape. Away... you... murderer!"

The man pulled back his hand and knelt on the ground in front of her. She watched intently as he stuck the torch into the muddy ground, not trusting his demeaning pose. It was so unlike this proud man to humble himself in such fashion, that it made her even more uneasy.

His eyes, darker than the deepest sea, pleaded with her. "Will you not forgive me?" he asked quietly, his voice mixing with the storm that blew around them.

Forgive him? How could she? She had trusted him, believed his lies, defended his actions. And he had betrayed her, betrayed them all with the ultimate most severe sin. A murderer, that's what he was, and she despised him for it; despised herself for the power he still held over her heart.

He seemed to sense her feelings, like he always had, and his lips formed a slight smile. "You were not afraid of me before, even when you knew the truth," he whispered. "You were very willing to comfort and reassure me when I told you about the deeds I had to do. Dumbledore's death is not the first and will not be the last that I have to take responsibility for."

She turned halfway against the nearest tree, leaning against it for support. She didn't let her eyes off the spot where he cowered, but did not want to look at his face anymore.

The truth hurt.

He stood and stepped towards her quickly, with all the grace of a great black predator. Before she knew what was happening, he grabbed her arms.

She screamed and tried to hit him, but he held her for a moment, then pushed her away, disgusted and furious with himself.

Tears started streaming out of her eyes; and he sighed in defeat, turning away from her.

The silence was heavy around them. It seemed that even the forest's creatures and the storm were holding their breath.

Her eyes moved to rake over his form, and she remembered what had drawn her to this man in the first place - long dark hair, and mysterious eyes, a strong sinewy figure covered by black robes that swirled in the cold night wind, and most of all an amazing mind.

She wanted to run to him, to go back to the time before the headmaster's death, but she couldn't, too much was broken. She lowered her head, and as if he had felt the weight of her gaze lift from his shoulders, he sighed and started to disappear into the shadows.

He stopped one last time and turned around to face her, watching her from afar. "I wish you wouldn't fear me, my love," he whispered more to himself than her. He shot her a last pleading look, before wrapping his cloak around himself and melting into the darkness.

Hermione leaned against the tree and sank to her knees. A chill ran down her spine as she rubbed her tired face. She was cold and felt a heaviness settle in her heart. Unable to lift herself just yet, she decided to rest for a bit before she would take the journey back to the castle.

Chapter Two - The Journey

Hermione watched the trees and hills being replaced by flat plains and buildings as the Hogwarts Express carried the students back to London. She felt cold and exhausted. All the events of the last week had taken their toll on her.

People who saw her took no notice of her sadness; she was still the same on the outside - bossy and helpful. If her smile seemed forced, they passed it off without further thought.

Inside, however, Hermione knew better. Deep down in her heart, she knew it was all because of him.

"I wish you wouldn't fear me, my love."

That last plea kept repeating itself in her head day and night. He'd never said he loved her, never called her anything but Miss Granger, even in the privacy of his quarters. Even when he held her.

It was a strange relationship they had, forbidden, dangerous, impossible. They were drawn to each other by loneliness, the need for a mind that could understand the fear of failure, exclusion, and loss.

Hermione had taken to wandering the grounds late at night, to clear her head and let the mask of understanding friend slip. It was in these lonely hours before the sun crept over the smooth, green hills that she met him by the lakeshore. He took no points, he gave no detention, he didn't say much at all - but he listened and understood.

Days turned into weeks, weeks into months. While the rest of Hogwarts' inhabitants spent the nights in dreams and slumber, their relationship developed. More and more often they would retreat to his private study for a glass of wine and a talk by the roaring fire.

In the privacy of his chambers, the reclusive and detached professor turned into the Severus Snape she'd come to trust.

To love.

He recounted his childhood, told her about his decisions - good and bad. Like an actor on stage, he held an emotive monologue that she never dared to interrupt.

In the last weeks before Dumbledore's death, he'd become silent again. She had asked then, but he couldn't, wouldn't tell her.

She had tried to reassure and comfort him, and he had allowed it. There had been hours when they just held each other. No word was spoken then.

As the red steam engine slowed, Hermione opened her weary eyes and gave her two best friends a soft smile. They were back in London.

She would go home to her parents for a week, and then to the Burrow for Bill's wedding, and then...

~o~o~ sshg_exchange ~o~o~

She paced around his old quarters, wearing nothing but a white flannel nightgown. There was nothing here that wasn't a reminder of what they had had. There was the only existing picture of them, his scent on the white cotton sheets... so many memories.

Every part of her being had been infused with him. If she could simply forget that he existed, it would be so much easier, but she could never do that. She could never take her mind apart and pick him from every crack and crevice that he had manifested himself in.

She was here; her heart had let her.

She needed to find out where he was.

Nothing could keep her away.

Chapter Three - The Run

The shadows themselves seemed to watch her, their eyes burrowing straight into her soul. Icy shivers danced down her spine. Desperately, she tried to force down the terror that threatened to consume her as she walked through the dimly lit streets.

Fear was her enemy, not the demons that dwelled in the darkness who could not touch her as long as she remained calm. Nervously she reached up and touched the tiny crucifix around her neck, trying to take comfort from a god she wasn't sure she believed in. Her other hand curled tightly around the wand in her pocket, yet neither seemed to bring any reassurance.

A loud crash had her break off into a run. Along the street she sprinted, away from the dark figures that had appeared out of nowhere. They grabbed for her and cursed. She just ran faster and faster. Her lungs burned, her legs protested - but she couldn't stop.

She ducked a beam of red light, but lost her footing on the wet grass. She tumbled down the bank of the small brook and hit her head on a wayward stone. Everything went

black.

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She couldn't remember passing out. But when she awoke, she was alone. And it was cold.

She stood at the base of the vastest canyon, so steep that one could not discern the top - only blackness. Everything here went infinitely into stark, cold blackness. Everything except the ground beneath her feet. So she walked.

The scenery changed little as she moved. Her shoes made no sound. None at all. She stopped to look at her feet - she couldn't tell if she had shoes on or not. Nonplussed, accomplishing nothing, she stopped caring. She began to walk again.

Impossible angles. The canyon just led into itself again. But it didn't. This was a new canyon, though it looked the same. She'd been walking for too long for it to be anything else. Right? Footprints. She'd have found her footprints, if it were repeating. There were no footprints. There was no repeating. No, no repeating. No repeating.

She shook it off. Looked back. No footprints. Looked down. No footprints. She stamped her feet into the ground. No marks, no dust clouds, and no sounds. Imprecation. No sound.

Eyes widened. No... NO! No, this couldn't be. Hands shook. Looked down. They were still. Did she have hands? Those were hands. She HAD hands. They were hands.

Cold. Couldn't feel the air, though. But very cold. Frigid, gelid. Frostbite cold. Bitter, deadly cold. Malicious cold.

Pause. Cold was a nonentity. No malice. Just cold. It was just cold. It was the air. Cold air. Cold, dispassionate, impersonal air. That was all. Just air. Chilling her hands. Her feet. The ones at the ends of her limbs. The ones that she'd always had, since she could remember. Those hands and feet. That body. That whole body that she could never lose. That she would see if she looked down. Stop. Eyes didn't move. But if she looked, it would be there. Definitely.

Walking again. No sounds. Hesitation. Kept going. Keep going, keep going. Just no sound. Deafness? Maybe. Speech. No sound. Test the vocal cords. Hand came up. Couldn't feel the throat. Couldn't find it. Looked down. Saw nothing.

It was there. Just couldn't feel. Too cold out. Numb. There. It must be right there. Speech. No vibrations.

Must be too cold. Too numb.

Coughed. Nothing. No sound. No sensation.

Ran. Ran like all hell. Getting nowhere. Moving no faster. Scrambling, screaming, bawling. Shaking, sprinting. Nothing. Moving at same pace. Moving? Yes, moving. Just hard to tell in the canyons. Moving. Moving, definitely.

Keep moving. Getting nowhere. Looked down. Still no feet. Too cold. Cried. No tears. No blur. Cried? Help. No sound. Help help help! No sound.

Ran again. Ran like wind. No feeling. No motion. No change in scenery. Nothing. Absolute nothing.

Keep running. Run, run, run. Nothing. Failed resolve. Entropy. Sat down. Didn't move. Looked down. No ground. Felt no ground. Standing up? No feet. No feet, no ground. Blackness. Not black. Indiscernible and utterly limpid. Perfect vision. No sight.

Scream. No sound. Eyes closed. No change. Anguish. It wasn't real. Something to cling to. Reality. Despair. Death-trap of the psyche. No no no no no. Run. Escape. Find another. No movement. No change. Vomited. Nothing. No sound. No feeling.

Collapsed. Cold. Feeble. No hope.

Chapter Four - The Return

He carefully passed the cold cloth over her forehead. Her eyelids fluttered, but she didn't wake. Three days and three nights he had sat at her bedside, not sleeping, not eating. He watched the soft rise and fall of her chest, and a sad smile tugged at his lips.

She had come to him.

It had been a foolish idea; she could have died - would have if he hadn't recognized her familiar silhouette in the darkness. The Death Eaters that kept watch around his house would have killed first and questioned later.

But she had come to him.

He would make sure that she survived this ordeal. And he was sure that she was on her way to recovery. Her body was healed; only her mind seemed to be trapped somewhere between the here and the beyond. He wouldn't leave her side until she woke from whatever nightmare she was stuck in.

Because she had come to him.

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Keep running. Run, run, run. Blackness.

Not black. Shades of grey. Grey not black.

Vision blurring. Fractions of light. Light.

Keep moving. Forward. On and on. Muscles burning.

Burning. Fire in her veins. Pain. Looked down. Feet kicking at nothingness. Feet, legs. Her legs. Hands. Those were hands. She HAD hands. They were hands.

Arms. Her arms, her body.

Coughed. Lungs aching. Rain. Sensation. Feelings. Life.

Warmth seeping into her skin. Heat inflaming her body. Chasing away the darkness.

Eyes widened. She wanted to see. There was only light and pain.

A gentle touch. His touch. His hand.

She needed to find him.

She needed to see him.

She needed him.

Her eyes flew open. She screamed.

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Her scream was the most frightening and most anticipated sound he ever heard. He held her against himself and rocked her like one would a little child. She quieted instantly.

He helped her drink some water to calm her throat. Assured that she was in no pain, he moved to face her. Black eyes met brown.

"You came to me." It was redundant, but he needed to ask.

She nodded.

"You know that I'll never let you go again?"

She nodded.

"Good. Know that if you leave, I'll follow. Wherever you go, I'll be there. I've seen you suffer. I've seen you cry for all that we've lost. I'll be everything you need from now until the end of the world. I'll be your father. I'll be your mother. I'll be your lover. I'll be yours."

Again she nodded. Not even the dark waters of death could keep her from him.

A/N: Severus' last words were (in part) taken from Placebo's song I'll be yours.