

Lullaby

by expected aberrance

On a dark and quiet night...continuation of String Quartet No. 4.

Lullaby Part One

Chapter 1 of 2

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Companion pieces to String Quartet No. 4. You don't have to read that to understand what's going on, but it would help a great deal. And please me immensely! :)

The response I received to that was overwhelming.

Disclaimer: Again, I own nothing, and stand to profit little from this venture besides personal satisfaction. And hopefully feedback.

This part is dedicated to Buttons, my own personal Trevor.

The pained glassy eyes look up at me with such trust as he snuggles into the warmth of my hand. I can't do this. I promised Neville, but I can't.

It's not that I haven't lost pets before. I was well-acquainted with the unfairness of life when, at six, the cat that had been a sibling to me was run over by a careless motorist.

It's the way he hops, though limping to one side, as if he still wants to tackle the world. His courageous leaps forward are crippled by the left back leg that refuses to function, dragging behind him, a dead weight. Neville has had to feed him crickets ground into paste to get him to eat anything. For the past two weeks, Trevor has only had the energy to flounder against the side of his cage, a far cry from his normally masterful escapes worthy of Houdini. The confinement has not dampened his spirit, however, and he takes in the surroundings from the comfort of my hands with a spark of curiosity and enthusiasm. His pebbled skin is gray, quivering through each uneven breath, and though I know it cannot possibly be, the sheen in his raised eyes seems to come from tears yet unshed in affliction.

I cradle him in one arm, taking my wand from its holster and holding it ready. He gazes at me expectantly and I pause. The words come to my lips, my hand tightens in anticipation of the wandstrokes, but a hitch in the back of my throat stops me once, twice, until I lower hand. If I cannot end the life of an animal in mercy, how will I be able to defend myself in battle?

Then again, no Death Eater will ever look this innocent and defenseless. He croaks a bit, shifting against my arm in an effort to gain more of the heat from my robes. The iciness of the hallway must be torture, one which I am prolonging in my weakness. I steady my breathing and raise the wand again, preparing myself for the spell that will end his misery—

"Well, Ms. Granger, I am sure you have a very good excuse for breaking curfew. I wasn't aware that prefects are exempt from all school rules."

The deep voice slithers from the shadows as its owner's form materializes in the light from the nearest candle, black robes separating from the darkness only in movement.

"What are you doing wandering the halls with..." —I cannot see his face clearly, but can easily enough detect the sneer forming there in the pause—"...a toad?"

"He's Neville's, sir."

"Really? Are you accompanying him on a stroll perhaps? To take in the night air?"

He is close enough that the flickering light cuts his features sharper than usual, granting his visage an aura of cruelty unmatched in daylight. I tighten my hold on Trevor, but do not falter before depthless shadow of his eyes.

"No, sir. He's been very ill lately. We took him to Madam Pomfrey and Hagrid, but neither could help him. There isn't much to do for old age."

The low growl he emits is probably a veiled message to get to the point.

"Well, he can't walk anymore, and breathing hurts him. Tonight, Neville decided that he wouldn't make him suffer any longer, but couldn't do it. I-I volunteered."

His attention shifts from me to the toad in my arms, then back to me with an indecipherable expression.

"Well?"

"I tried." I look away in anticipation of the cutting remark concerning my infallibility I expect to leave his lips with this admittance. When he does speak, though, his voice is the gentlest I've ever heard it.

"There is no shame in not being able to end the existence of another living creature, Ms. Granger."

I meet his gaze and he raises an eyebrow in question, for once not mockingly. I nod slightly, and he places a hand carefully over Trevor in a manner that would be affectionate in anyone else. I can feel the warmth of his hand and arm near mine, and it is far more comforting than I would have expected from the vampire of the dungeons. He rubs the pad of his thumb over the pebbly skin between the bleary eyes now locked on him and mutters something that sounds suspiciously like "sleep." Trevor shudders once before relaxing completely.

"Thank you."

Snape looks up at me, surprised, and I realize that it was I who spoke. Taking advantage of his momentary shock, I wrap my free arm around him, pressing my cheek to his chest for as long as I expect him to tolerate the close proximity of annoying student and dead toad. He freezes even more at this trespass, but gradually relaxes into the embrace. The amount of time passing in the peace between us is much more than I could have hoped, and I wonder if I imagine the hand lightly grazing my face. When I finally release him, we step back from one another silently, and he gives me a slight bow of the head before turning in a swirl of black robes toward the dungeons.

I return to the common room with Trevor wrapped in the spare cloak I carried. I wordlessly hand him to Neville, giving him a tight hug in the process, before retreating to my dormitory. He does not need to know that his familiar's executioner was his most feared professor. I will keep this to myself; I know Snape will. But it shifts my perception of him just enough. He is a bit less of the smirking mystery and more the solid form I felt against me. I wonder if anyone has ever told him that compassion is not a weakness, either.

Thanks for reading!

Lullaby Part One

Chapter 2 of 2

On a dark and quiet night... continuation of String Quartet No. 4.

Lullaby Part Two

Warning: This is a bit darker. Hope you like.

Disclaimer: Same as before. No profit, no sue.

Two parts malice measured and sliced thinly. Hatred diced fine, laced with bitterness, then added slowly to a simmering cauldron of wrath. Thus is my life carefully stirred and ladled drop by drop into vials and flasks. I dismiss the errant first-year I justifiably assigned detention. He trips over the pail and rags he used to scrub the flobberworm entrails pasting his desk and those surrounding. Longbottom may have competition yet.

Counting one-thousand seven-hundred sixty-five, counting one-thousand seven-hundred sixty six...

Hall patrols are less of a burden than my other duties. The silence I am granted then is precious, and I savor every shallow breath of mine that echoes in the still corridors. I begin my journey in the dungeons of course, continuing up through each floor above. For the first part of my shift, the only wanderer I encounter is Filch's cat, and we salute in passing, fellow killers in the darkness. I creep through the Astronomy Tower, past the realm of the hopefully sleeping Boy Wonder, and reach the library before anything or anyone out of place catches my attention. A light flickers beneath the door. Granger, probably. I lost track of how many times I've been forced to awaken her after curfew, slumped over a stack of parchment and books, since Pince decided to entrust her with closing the library a few nights a week. The smudges of ink decorating her face are almost as amusing as her startled expression and carefully controlled but unconcealed anger when I take points from Gryffindor.

I walk to the door silently, but before I open it I hear voices.

"Draco, you don't have to do this."

I place a Silencing Spell on the unwarded door, opening it slowly.

Malfoy's answer is low and uneven. "My father's getting the Kiss because of you. Filthy Mudblood."

Granger sits at one of the tables near the Restricted Section, both hands placed flat on the surface in front of her. Malfoy stands with his back to me, arm held shaking in front of him.

"Please! I'm sorry for what happened, but you don't--"

"Enough!" His voice breaks over the word, but he has enough strength to hold his wand steadily toward her and begin the curse. "*Avada--*"

The thing within me lashes out, and I've killed him before he can form the next syllable. His body hits the chair in front of him during its descent to the floor, twisting into an unnatural position, his head lolling until his pale blue eyes stare through me. I've killed him, the boy whose birth I clearly remember, the pretty doll of a child that delighted in his first flights on a broom, the youth whose education and growth into manhood were my responsibility.

His last breath is drawn back out of him in a low death rattle as my own respiration deepens. His face pales lighter than the ice-blond locks hanging in his still eyes, the blood draining from the capillaries just underneath his skin, and my own face flushes in response. I see myself in him, a mere boy who has done little wrong in his short life besides having the misfortune to be born in a family that taught him to hate. I feel the cells of his body die one by one, decomposition accelerated, each a small spark feeding the inferno of pleasure taking hold in every part of my body. His muscles stiffen in the flex of rigor mortis as the power hums through me, igniting every nerve ending in an explosion that whites out my vision and dries the tears in my eyes.

When I float back to myself, still partially wrapped in euphoria, I see the girl in front of me. She turns her attention from the broken child at my feet to me. She is the first innocent to directly witness a murder of mine, and certainly one of the few to observe my enjoyment of it. I see her take in my hands open at my sides, the tear tracks glistening on my cheeks that contrast with my pupils dilated in ecstasy. I feel her gaze scouring every inch of me, and dare not move in the judgment. She steps toward me around the table and rapidly cooling corpse of my student to stand a pace away, still calculating. I close my eyes until I feel a light touch on my cheek. I open them as she turns my head toward her, forcing my eyes to hers.

The acceptance I find there is nothing I have ever experienced. There is no disapproval or reproach in her gaze, nor controlling promise of more carnage to come. Her eyes are as bright as upon a newly brewed potion or solved Arithmancy equation. She steps closer, breaking eye contact with me only when her head lowers to my chest and her arms come around to hold me tightly.

Her embrace is answered with a joyful cry by the beast inside me, and together we hunger for the warmth of the small form pressed to me.

I will kill for her now, though she knows it not.

Again, thanks for reading.