

Not Here

by Snapekat

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Chapter 1 of 1

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The idea for this ficlet was created by my dear friend Ginny and I as a way to deal with some of the astounding revelations that were illustrated in Deathly Hallows. She wrote her own version at her Live Journal account (friend only), and I wrote mine, which ended up being strikingly similar! So I will dedicate this to her (Gin-Gin) and thank her for her wonderful beta services, too.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

She paid little attention to the dirt and dangling roots ensnaring her feet as she climbed through the hole. She hadn't cleaned the blood from her face. Her hair still hung in unruly, escaped strands about her head. The sounds of celebration, relief, and periodic grief faded behind her, the further she dived into the earthen passage. Her eyes stayed focused straight ahead, searching the approaching darkness before the light could reveal its secrets. Carefully she made her way, accompanied on her journey by only her wand light and dank, eerie silence.

After endless steps that further exhausted her tired, old feet, finally the tunnel began an upward slope, and she knew she was near. Minerva emerged into an old, dilapidated house she hadn't set foot in for more years than she could remember. It felt as though nothing had changed, but she knew it had. Everything had. And she knew that somewhere in that ramshackle hovel something very important lay ignored and forgotten.

Immediately her eyes went to the rickety, soaring staircase, and she knew her path must continue up it. On legs that hardly obeyed her command, shaking with nervous dread and fatigue, she began the upward climb. As though beckoned by a silent call, Minerva moved on until she came to an empty, tattered bedroom, draped in dim, gloomy light.

It was there she found what she had come for. Though in the murky shadows, she knew that the black, rumpled form on the floor was the fallen body of Severus Snape. For several moments she couldn't venture past the door. She stood leaning against its support, her hand unconsciously going to her aching heart.

"Oh, Severus," she whispered through fresh tears.

In time she was able to stir, but slowly and cautiously. Her steps were careful and quiet as though afraid of disturbing his slumber. A quick command brought the light in the room up to a reasonable level, which only revealed further shock and heartbreak. Voldemort was dead; the world was free of his tyranny. What few supporters that might be hanging about the shadows did not concern the usually stoic, fearless woman. But the sight before her did more damage than the flurry of spells she had dodged and blocked all night could have if they had landed every blow.

He lay in a long black heap, a pool of dark blood and wisps of memory in silvery fibers fanned out about him. The only contrast came from his splashes of ashen face and pale hands not covered in blood. His black eyes stared absently at Minerva with flat, dull scrutiny causing her heart to spasm with grief. No longer did they glitter with

sharp cunning or burn wickedly over a passionate retort. They never would again.

When she finally found the control to force her body forward, she bent down next to the still form, ignoring the protest of her knees and the gore which would soak through her robes. With shaking hands, she reached to him and felt the iciness of his body. The true realization that he was gone seemed to be announced anew and wracking, silent sobs again shook her body. As she cried Minerva grasped his body and pulled him into her lap as a mother might a child in need of comfort.

His eyes now seemed to look through her, past her, into a different place, far away, into which he had already disappeared. She was struck by how light he felt, his body so thin under the thick black clothing. Cradling his head in the crook of her arm, she pushed the lank, black hair aside revealing a face that suddenly seemed too young to belong to the grown man she knew him to be.

Memories and visions of the past swam before her eyes. She saw Severus as a young boy, shabby, thin, and shy, entering Hogwarts with eyes as round with wonder and amazement as any new student. She remembered a determined boy willing his mouse, more with his mind than with his wand, to turn into a tea cup and succeeding more quickly than most because of it. With shame she recalled the many times she had witnessed from the corner of her eye his harassment by bigger, older, or more popular students. And she now also remembered the times she had seen Severus walking quietly beside a vivacious red-head, casting looks of silent, veiled adoration that went unnoticed by most everyone, including the girl.

Her feelings for the man in her arms had spanned the gamut. Sympathy, respect, fear, loathing, confusion, and sadness had all described her pronouncement of Severus Snape at one time or another. All too often he himself was to blame for her misjudgments for he never allowed anyone to truly know him. He seemed perfectly willing to be the object of hatred or fear based on rumor or speculation. He reveled in his own persona of a cold, heartless being who never felt and never cared. It made what she now knew about him more painful to realize. He had lived his life carrying a heavy burden of unrequited love and remorse, which had proven so painful and crippling that he must have decided long ago that hating was much easier than loving.

Tears ran down her withered cheek and fell onto his open, blank eye, for a moment, giving it a lively luster in which the light reflected and danced. But the effect quickly faded, and the eyes again showed the emptiness underneath. With that, Minerva gently placed her fingers against his eyelids and lowered them, giving him a peaceful appearance she had never known him to have in life.

Drawing in a long, quivering breath, she pulled him to her and hugged him fiercely.

"I'm so sorry, Severus," she whispered. "I'm so sorry I never knew or understood you. I'm so sorry I couldn't find a way to trust you. And I'm so sorry you never trusted me. I can't make up for it now. But I will make sure everyone knows of your sacrifice and your honor. And I will NOT leave you here in this horrible place."

Pressing her trembling lips to his cold forehead, she kissed him lovingly. Then, gently she laid him down and straightened his limbs. Taking her own damp handkerchief, Minerva began to wipe the stains from his face, never thinking once that a quick spell would do a better job. For some reason, she felt he deserved something more personal. She never recalled ever touching him herself or seeing anyone else touch him. It was a lonely existence to which no one deserved to be sentenced to. For all her good intentions, only a spell would remove the tell-tale blood from his clothing and hair. But soon he looked as neat and composed as he had every day of his life.

Another wave of tears threatened her. Instead she steeled herself and gave the peaceful man a well-practiced, stern look.

"If you and Albus had only told someone, things could have been different," she chastised. "And frankly, I'm very angry with you both. You've left us and I feel positively lost. The students feel lost. What is Hogwarts going to do without you? When I get a chance to have a word with the portraits of the last two Hogwarts' headmasters, don't think I won't have quite a speech to make!"

She sighed tiredly. "Well, you two certainly deserve each other and can spend the rest of eternity feeling smug about your successful plans because I'm planting you right next to Dumbledore on the campus grounds, Severus. We'll have a special memorial service and dedicate a statue and a plaque to all the friends and family we've lost. It will be quite grand. You would hate it, I'm sure," she said to him as she straightened his cravat.

Finally, she rose from her spot on the floor, but not without great effort and great protest from her body. A flick of her wand elevated Severus's body off the floor.

"We're going now, headmaster," she commented to him as they both moved toward the door. "There is a special place of honor already prepared for our heroes, and it is most definitely not here."