

Cold Wind Blows

by Jenwryn

The Battle of Hogwarts might be over but that doesn't mean the pain is over:
Hermione has her dead to grieve. Darkish fic.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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A thousand thanks to my marvellous beta reader, Lady Laurelin!

Hermione sat and stared at the dull surface of the desk. She'd been staring at it for the last half hour, just watching the old ingrained ink stains in the wood, and not moving. She *couldn't* move. It was as though all the life and energy had been sucked out of her, and she was left incapable of doing anything but sitting and staring. She wasn't even entirely sure how she'd ended up there. She remembered vaguely walking down the halls – so cold and oddly empty, as though Hogwarts had withdrawn into itself – and supposed she'd ended up in her old rooms out of sheer subconscious force of habit. Not that the rooms were actually hers anymore; if the Fat Lady's portrait hadn't been ruined, she'd never have gotten in. No, the rooms weren't hers anymore. But the ink stains in the woodwork had been made by her hand.

Thoughts passed through her mind but pitifully few of them made any sense. Echoes of screams, flashes of colour and magic, kept spilling across them and tangling them up. Voldemort's face. Voldemort's hate. Pain from her body's physical wounds rose up and begged her acknowledgement, but Hermione ignored it. Before her eyes, staring immobile at the desk, hung suspended the memory of bodies.

Rows and rows of bodies.

Death Eaters and Harry Loyalists lay side by side in the infirmary. Someone had removed the beds to make more space, and the bodies rested, still, on white sheets upon the floor. *The dead are all equal beneath the touch of eternity* Professor McGonagall had said wearily when a witch had protested that the Death Eaters should lie elsewhere. *In a civil war everyone loses*, Minerva had whispered, like a sigh.

The injured were being treated elsewhere. The infirmary was one of the few places large enough to hold the fallen, and so the Great Hall, though devastated, was where most of the wounded were; Madam Pomfrey and her helpers had gone to them. Hermione hadn't known, and she'd ended up in the infirmary. She'd simply opened the door and walked in. Walked in and found the dead in their slumber. They were alone in the infirmary, her and the dead. The dead don't need watching. They aren't going anywhere.

She should have turned around and walked straight back out – should have shut the door like a barrier between them and put it from her mind. She should have, but she didn't. At some stage in the last few years Hermione had lost the knack of listening to her inner voice of reason.

She walked up and down the rows, their blankly gazing, glassy eyes seeming to follow her movements. So many faces she knew. So many faces she'd been to school with, sat in class with, laughed at or been angry with. Faces she could remember as eleven-year-olds. Other faces, she didn't recognise at all. Some because she didn't know them. Others because of the workings of curses, of jinxes, of destruction –

Hermione walked amongst them like a young woman in a waking dream.

Fred Weasley had died, she knew that, but he wasn't here. The Weasleys must have taken him away. They had vanished soon after it had ended, and she remembered numbly that they'd retreated to The Burrow to mourn their losses. He'd asked her to go with them, Ron had, but she'd refused. The blood spilt on the stones hadn't given her permission to leave just yet.

Fred wasn't there, but Tonks and Remus were.

Someone had taken the time to place them side by side, and unlike many of the dead they'd been bathed slightly, and their eyes were shut. Hermione stood and looked down at them lying there on the floor and felt the edges of her mind fraying slightly. The sight of them there... How could they – so brave, so tough – be dead, and she not? What made her worth being alive and them not?

The Lupins didn't stay there for long. Even as Hermione stood and watched, a group of wizards came and lifted them carefully with magic and took them away. Perhaps someone had decided to put the members of the Order somewhere else. Perhaps Tonks' mother had come for them. Hermione didn't know. She watched blankly as the strangers spoke to her, but she didn't understand; their words were just noise to her ears, and she turned away from them and continued to walk along the rows of torn and dirty bodies.

It was at the end of the fourth row, beneath a window, that she found him.

She stood at his side and pressed her head back against the cool glass behind her. Cold wind slipped in a crack in the pane and scratched her with its nails. He, then, lay here amongst the rest of them. Perhaps Harry hadn't had time to tell the others what he knew. Maybe he hadn't shared with them the memories that he had, despite it all, found the time to share with her. Possibly they didn't know that she was gazing upon the face of the bravest wizard in the room. "Oh, Professor..." she murmured, and the word caught on her dry lips and came out battered at the edges. She knelt by his side and vacillated, then reached out a trembling hand and brushed his hair from his cold face. She was glad his eyes were shut. But now that she had found him, she felt oddly hollow, and she wondered what else she had expected. Some kind of closure, perhaps. "Severus," she whispered because she knew she needed to say it, just once, even if now it was too late and meant nothing to anyone but her and perhaps not even that. She found a clean handkerchief in her pocket and started to clean his face gently.

Hermione didn't know how long she knelt there, but eventually they came to take him away. She didn't go with them. Instead she stood up and wandered through the cold empty halls and ended up at her old desk. Her old desk, where she sat, and her tears fell to meet the ink stains from her childhood, and she played a dead man's memories through her mind, the memories that Harry had shared. Because Harry, only Harry, knew about her. Knew her secret.

And she wondered how long it would be before she could answer, "Still? After all this time?" with a shake of her head.