

A Forever Kind of Thing

by *h_vic*

A woman contemplates the psychological scars of the Last Battle and how they took her husband away from her.

This story was written prior to the release of Deathly Hallows and hence does not comply with DH-canon.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: Thanks to *dancingcarrot21* and *miss padfoot* over on MNFF for beta-ing.

A forever kind of thing... That's what it was.

The scars, I mean. The damage. The memories. They never left him. I could see it in his eyes every time he woke up next to me, shaking and drenched in sweat, his legs tangled in the sheets. He could hear them screaming still. I knew he could. He never talked to me about the dreams, but I saw it in his eyes. They haunted him: the ones he couldn't save... the ones he had *killed*.

I'm sure Draco Malfoy featured heavily in those nightmares like the actor in a play he couldn't walk out of. The scene replaying itself mercilessly in his mind, forcing him to live those horrific moments time and again. He thought of Malfoy as an insufferably arrogant git... but to have killed him...

Voldemort had forced Malfoy to atone for his failure to kill Dumbledore and drawn him further into the darkness. He held Draco's family over him as a threat; his mother was all but a hostage. No one would dare fail Voldemort twice. Malfoy was callous and rude, but I don't think he was ever truly evil, not really. Can necessity and need ever make you evil? Is it so wrong to do what duress and circumstance dictate? Was my husband wrong to do what he had to do?

He did *have* to do it. Malfoy had already killed Luna and was torturing Neville. He *had* to do it. But I watched him slide to his knees as Malfoy fell. He stayed there, shoulders slumped brokenly and head bowed, for so long, the battle raging around him. I wanted to go to him then, but there were too many Death Eaters between us. I wouldn't have been able to reach him, and I had to continue to fight, especially if he could not - we needed everyone we had; we were so few. Maybe that might have changed things. Maybe, if I had gone to him then, I could have brought him back from the abyss before he had fallen out of reach. That is the guilt that I will always bear, just as he bears his guilt for the act. Maybe I could have saved my husband then, and that haunts me, but I do not truly know, and cannot ever know, if it would have made that crucial difference. I know though that I cannot dwell on it or the guilt would tear as destructively at me as it does at him.

A Stunning Spell, which shattered the cold stone next to him, showering him with shards and gashing his face and arms - physical scars that healed so much more easily than those in his mind - finally broke his reverie, but he fought on reflex only - his mind and heart were no longer in the fight. He was an automaton. A piece of him died with Malfoy that day; a piece that he couldn't get back.

I know the truth of it now, why they call them the *Unforgivable Curses*. Even if the outside world condones it and acknowledges that you did what you had to the reasons were right that isn't enough. His reasons were right. But it is forgiving yourself that is the hard part. Professor Dumbledore told us that killing rips the soul, and I saw it that day. I saw the man I loved have his soul torn open while the coldness seeped in. I've seen the void it left; the shell of a man, but with passion drained from him.

The defeat of Voldemort had taken longer than we had thought it would. Five years it took; five years from Dumbledore's death to Voldemort's. That time was a blessing, and a curse. It was time to love; to find something to fight for. But so often the thing that you fight for is the thing that you can't stand to lose. So many lost the things they fought for. He and I are not the only ones left scarred.

Neville has retreated even further into himself since Luna's death. He drinks too much, doesn't eat, and barely sleeps. I would worry for him, if I had anything left to spare. We have so little to spare for our friends now, so deeply immersed in our own pain as we are. There is no one to help Neville because no one can help themselves anymore. Maybe we'll lose him too, wrapped up in ourselves and unable to see the cost.

Remus is still struggling valiantly against the darkness that threatens to engulf him without Tonks. He continues to fight for the sake of their daughter, determined she will not be just another orphan of the war. I don't think we will lose Remus, his daughter gives him his reason to carry on, but we've lost the Remus we knew. There was a spark in him that is lost forever; a piece of him that went with Tonks.

Bill and Fleur should have had each other, but Voldemort preyed on the weak and the young. He took their eighteen-month-old child. Voldemort knew that our weakness was our hearts (what he could never understand was that this was also our greatest strength). He realised there were crueller ways to remove people from the fight than just to kill them. They had faced so much together, but this was one heartache too many, and their marriage could not survive the tragedy. The loss tore at them both and tore them apart with the war still continuing and the losses still mounting, there was no time for them to truly mourn and heal together. They grew isolated and apart in their separate grief, and finally Fleur could not face the wintry reserve, which had developed between them, and fled from their sorrow, returning to France with her family. I still miss her. Over time, we had come to see what Bill loved in her. But in an instant, she became just one more person the war took from us.

We lost so many we loved.

We should have been the lucky ones: we still had each other after all. We tried to be. We tried to move on and build a life together. But I couldn't reach him. I couldn't heal him. He only drifted further and further away. He was like driftwood floating outwards on the tide into deeper and deeper water, slowly sinking. The sinking was *slow*, sometimes almost imperceptible. He'd have good days, when I'd think we would stand a chance, but then he'd pull away from me all over again, becoming just a little more distant than he had been before.

I thought our son would bring him back to me, but it wasn't enough. Our child's smile couldn't even breach the cage around his father's heart. We named our son after Charlie, who had sacrificed himself for our lives. But he could never see that it was a sacrifice willingly given and just counted it as one more death on his conscience. I knew it ate away at him that he couldn't prevent it, that he saw Charlie as just one more person we cared about whose blood was on his hands. I thought it might ease the bitterness to have Charlie's memory live on in our son, but it failed to reach the cold, hard core of empty numbness that had settled inside of him.

And then one day, he was gone.

Just a note, an apology that he could never be the husband and father we deserved. A soulless, lifeless piece of parchment to say goodbye, but I keep it still my last link to him. His familiar script was rough, as if his hand shook as he wrote it, but no tears had smudged the ink or wrinkled the parchment. I think perhaps he was too far gone for tears too many have been shed by us all, and so we close down, shut off our grief. He couldn't even tell me he loved me. Only that he had once, but didn't even know what love could mean now. He said we would be better off without him: that he wanted us to have the life he could not give us.

He never gave me a choice. I would have asked him to stay. I would have tried to mend his tattered soul for as long as it took. I wouldn't have given up on him as he gave up on himself. But he never asked me what I had wanted. He just left, thinking he knew best, as always. So, I try to live my life in the hope that he finds his peace and comes back to us, back to where he belongs.

Then maybe he can heal me.

Sometimes, I wish I could have walked away from it all like he has, away from the constant reminders of everything that was *before*. But I can't. I have Charlie to think about someone has to. This is what we fought for after all a chance to live free of Voldemort's shadow, a better life. Maybe we can't have that; maybe the shadow was cast too long, but our son can and I do my best to ensure that he does. I owe him that and I want that for him. I do not let Charlie see my pain, and I do not tell him that Daddy has gone because his world fell apart; I tell him that his Daddy loves him and wants to be here with us more than anything, but that he can't, just for now.

He didn't say where he went, although I have my suspicions, but I can't go after him. If he has chosen this path, then he will only return once he has reconciled himself with the past. As much as it hurts to be without him, I know I have to let him do this. I will survive I have to. I can be strong enough, for Charlie. I can be strong enough, for myself. I could have been strong enough for the three of us...

So Voldemort claims one more victory he has taken my husband from me. Voldemort took him from me two years ago, in truth, when he took the final piece of my husband's heart and brought him to this. In a backlash of power at his death, Voldemort took one last life with him: the life of the one who vanquished him.

This is the death I saw etched in every line of my husband's face. This is the death that sent the cracks spider-webbing through his soul. The final life lost in the battle was the life of one who could not save himself, although he saved us all. A life, I believe, the man I loved would have sacrificed himself for many times over. But he could not. There was nothing he could do. He could not save this last piece of himself. He could not save his best friend, *our* best friend. Harry died and, with him, took the final piece of Ron's humanity.