

Pyrrhic

by Ladymage Samiko

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Chapter 1 of 1

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It was the deepest part of winter, a time when it seems that it will never be warm again and there is no color left in the world. The trees of the Forbidden Forest were bare and black in the indifferent noonday light; the water was steely grey, frozen into immobility.

It was an appropriate time to be brooding about Death.

Hours, perhaps, had passed the Girl by as she remained seated on the snowbank, eyes restlessly roving the landscape; though they saw little and registered even less. She noticed the cold only in a distant, objective way--she knew it was cold, but feeling it was another matter altogether. The dampness seeping through her cloak and robes was just as insignificant. The only thing that mattered was the Solitude. And the Silence. The Blessed, Blessed Silence.

Because They were gone. All of Them.

The wind whipped around her, trying to push her hair into her face, hair that she had chopped viciously short. You couldn't describe inch-long ringlets as 'bushy,' could you? And the rest of it had been burned. A sacrifice to the Gods, perhaps, or an offering to the Dead. Not that it mattered, anyway. They would have laughed at the idea, if They had been here to laugh. But the Dead didn't laugh, did They? Because the Dead couldn't do anything anymore. None of Them could. Harry couldn't. Ron couldn't. Neither could Ginny. Or Percy or Fred or George. Or Arthur or Molly. The Dead scrolled through her brain as though she was reading a list, written out in precise handwriting in stark black ink. Neville. Seamus. Padma and Parvati. Flitwick. Vector. McGonagall. Poor, stupid Trelawny. Bear-like Hagrid. Tired, sad-eyed Remus.

And the morons that were left said that they had won. Just because Voldemort was dead, too. Stupid. Too stupid. There was no way that this--this total devastation could be called 'winning.' A Pyrrhic Victory. A small breath of sound, self-mocking, escaped her. That was the problem with being overeducated; her brain would present her with the correct term for anything, whether she wished or no.

It was still stupid by whatever name you called it, anyway.

And it was stupid to think about it. Thinking about it only made it worse; better not to think. It was surprisingly easy to stop thinking; one simply put up walls in one's brain, putting everything on one side and one's self on the other. When she did that, she didn't have to think about anything at all. She could just sit here, on the snowbank, listening to Nothing. And Nothing was good. Especially as the sickly grey of noon darkened into the waxy grey of evening.

Most of her cloak was wet. How odd.

"You'll catch your death out here, girl." The Man had appeared rather than approached, it seemed. Certainly, the stark black and white of him was just as much a part of the Landscape as everything else.

"Will I?" She cocked her head at him. "It doesn't feel like it. Nor does it seem to matter."

"Not that it makes much difference to me personally, you understand." It seemed that this part of the Landscape was determined to shatter her Silence. But that didn't seem to matter much now, anyway. "But it does reflect badly on the school if it lets one of the survivors die."

"But I'm not a survivor," the Girl pointed out. "I would know if I was. But I don't feel like it, so I'm not."

"What does your feeble reasoning tell you that you are, then?" A Question. And it was too deeply ingrained in her to answer Questions.

"A ghost, of course." Why did the Man ask in the first place? It was obvious.

"Ah. I see." There was something in His Voice, but it would be too much of a bother to think about it. "Do you talk to that brainless pillock Potter, then? The Boy Too Stupid To Survive?"

"Take that back." She stared solidly at the snow in front of her. It was very white.

"I don't think I will," the Man continued easily. "No one bothered to tell him what a Stupid Git he was when he was alive; you can pass it on for me now that he's dead. Of course, that goes for the equally idiotic Ronald Weasley, who had more freckles than brains. Obviously, since it seems he never quite figured out the concept of ducking. And then there was Jellyfish Lupin, who always needed someone else to make his decisions for him..."

"Stop it!" she screamed, flying at him in sheer fury. "Shut up! Just shut up, you heartless bastard!" Her fists pounded at his chest; he did nothing to stop her for several minutes. He then pulled the sobbing girl close, his arms tight around her shaking form. "Why?" she finally choked out. "Why? Why did they all go and leave us behind?"

"There is no answer for that question," he replied bluntly. "Not here. Not now. But there is one thing I believe you should hear."

"What then?" She was impatient; this was not where she wanted to be or what she wanted to be doing.

"They call a battle like this a Pyrrhic Victory." She started slightly to hear Him echo her thoughts. "A battle where the costs are so great that victory is practically pointless." Looking up, she watched His face look into the distance. "And it is called so in honor of a man named Pyrrhus. But few remember there was a woman named Pyrrha, once upon a time."

"So?" Her voice was harsh.

"She was said to have survived the Great Flood of antiquity. She and her husband alone. Everyone else, everything else she knew was obliterated."

"What did she do?"

"She lived, Hermione." The Man finally looked down and into her eyes. "She and her husband lived."

"And is there a reason to?" she asked, held by the liquid, changing black of his gaze.

He shrugged eloquently, a movement she felt rather than saw. "Perhaps. If we both believe."

Her hand reached up, hesitantly, and her fingers traced the rigid planes of his face. When she found that he did not flinch away, she just as carefully raised herself up, pressing icy lips to his.

After a time, they pulled apart. "Will you take me inside, Severus?" Hermione asked him. "It is very cold out here."

One doesn't always need words to answer a question. Severus Snape draped both his arm and his cloak over her shoulders and guided her up the hill to the school.

an: This was a one-shot written way back in 2004. Now that the drabbles are up to date, I'm going to start archiving my longer fics here as well.