

butterfly wings

by Ladymage Samiko

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Our lives tick by like pendulum swings,

Poor little things, puppets on strings...

~ Leslie Bricusse, 'beautiful things' (Dr. Dolittle)

Oh, god, it's so difficult to see him like this. So hard when there's nothing I can do. I had considered becoming a mediwitch, once upon a time, having grand visions of healing others with a wave of my wand or a single potion. But what good is healing the body when the soul is what's broken?

He's been like this for over a year now. He moves, eats what is set in front of him, drinks what he's given. But his spirit is gone; there is nothing behind the black obsidian of his eyes. I never realized how much vitality was there--the crackling energy, the wit, the determination, the razor intelligence--all harnessed behind the singular strength of purpose. I never realized it until it was all dead. Oh, most people say he is lucky to be alive, that it is a miracle he survived. A miracle, perhaps, but I often think that it would have been more merciful to let him die.

For what is left in life for a broken puppet? What is left when everything you worked for has betrayed you?

I glance at the center of High Table, then turn away quickly before the anger and hatred in my eyes betray me. I've discovered that it's not really so difficult to hide things from the Headmaster. It's actually quite simple. He's never noticed how much I care for--how much I love--Severus nor how much I hate him for cutting the last strings that kept Severus here. How much I hate that twinkle in his eye while he celebrates our 'victory' while the man he abandoned is little more than an automaton. How much I hate him for killing my hope. Severus and I had been working together before-- and he might have learnt to care for me, given time. I'll never know, now. We never had time, never had a chance to develop the bond that might have kept him here, might have saved him from the black despair that overwhelmed him.

What else is there, when the man you have pledged every fibre of your being to tosses you aside like yesterday's paper? When the people you risked everything to save ignore you like they ignore the bum on the street corner, without even a "Good morning, how are you?" When you discover your entire life has been sacrificed to something not worth saving?

And what about when you make the woman who loves you wonder if she should have given her formerly beloved world the finger and returned to a Muggle existence?

Harry nudges me and asks for the salt. I hand it to him and he gives my arm a sympathetic squeeze. I don't hate him. Harry honestly cares, not just about the wizarding world, but about the people. About me and my feelings (which he figured out pretty early on) and about Severus, too. I resent the attention and accolades a little, but then, so does he. We both know that there are so many others who deserve credit. And who will never receive it.

I return my gaze to Severus, knowing that he'll never notice it anyway. And that to the others, it looks like I'm simply staring into space, probably contemplating some

obscure arithmantic formula. If only it were that simple. I find that my mind most often replays that day, wondering if I should have simply left him. I don't mean alone; I would have stayed by his side. But I wonder now if I should have let him die that day. Discovered by Voldemort, mentally and physically tortured, left to die in the middle of nowhere. I found him and, stupid girl that I was, brought him back to Hogwarts. Pomfrey patched him up, but for what? For this? For him to be abandoned by everything that had any meaning for him whatsoever?

If I had just stayed with him that day, in the middle of bloody nowhere, he would have died, yes, but he would have died in the company of someone who loved him, with the satisfaction that he had fulfilled his task, dying in the line of duty. And perhaps he would have gained the respect he deserves. 'Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.' And, honestly, what more can any of us ask for?

An excellent question, that.

I've debated the possibilities; I've had a year to turn them over in my head, extrapolate all of the outcomes. Use my arithmancy skills to some useful purpose. And I've made my decision.

I've finished my dinner; so has he. I slip from my seat, circle around the alumni table that was installed only a few months ago. I approach High Table, smiling at Minerva, who probably understands me better than anyone else here, ignoring the Headmaster, who was visibly preparing himself for a conversation. To the end of the table, where Severus sits, alone, nearly forgotten. I think he's only here because they can't think of what else to do with him. He has no family; Harry would not allow them to send him to his manor. Not after I showed him that mausoleum, with house elves even madder than Kreacher and the family crypt the only source of company. Just goes to show you that no matter how bad things are, they could always be worse.

I place my hand over the one Severus has in his lap. He turns, an automatic response; there is no look of query, or even of derision. I take it in mine and indicate he should come with me. He follows dumbly, his hand lifeless, like some sort of leash. Determined, I tuck it in the crook of my arm and smile brilliantly at him through the tears. It doesn't matter any more if the Headmaster notices or not. I glance back briefly into the Great Hall; Harry's face is sad and resigned as he merely watches.

We make our way down to the dungeons. There is a new Potions Master now, but just as Harry fought to have Severus remain at Hogwarts, I fought to have him keep his old chambers. The door is keyed to his mere presence now; we enter easily. I guide Severus to a chair before closing the door and locking it with wards powerful enough that only two people will be able to enter: Harry by permission and the Headmaster by force. I then take up a pair of scissors and get to work on Severus' hair; it has grown long, longer than anyone had ever seen it before. It was beautiful. But too long for I what I have in mind. That doesn't stop me from taking a lock, dipping an end in the melted wax of a candle, and tucking it in a pocket. I finish quickly, tidying the ends with a flick of my wand. Another flick and the severed strands fly to the fireplace, disappearing with a slight crackle and the smell of scorching.

A detour into his private stores, which, oddly enough have been left alone. Probably because no one else can tell what is there and the risk of trying to find out isn't worth it. Severus changed all of the labels to his own form of shorthand years ago. He taught it to me at the end of seventh year; I felt so honoured by his trust. I pick out a flask from the darkest corner of the room, sneezing as I disturbed a year's worth of dust. Taking a rag, I brush off the flask and pour its contents into two glass vials. I carry them back into the room where Severus sits, still unmoving. The color of the potion is pretty in the firelight, the color of pomegranate pills. I watch the flickering of the light for several silent moments before taking a bit of cloth from my satchel and wrapping them up carefully. It wouldn't do to have them break.

I take a jar out and guide Severus to the fireplace. Shaking out some Floo Powder, I throw it in and murmur the destination; I don't want anything in the castle to hear. Not that it will matter, I suppose. I shove Severus into the fireplace as gently as possible. When he's gone, I finish the last of my tidying. Severus' wand is cleaned and placed on the chimneypiece; I will not make that decision for him. My own I use to scour every last race of the two of us from the rooms and beyond; I will not leave anything that they can use to find us. I even put on gloves and clean my own wand. It makes quite a satisfying snap after that--a final, conclusive sound. With my satchel on my shoulder, I toss the Floo Powder and disappear into the network.

My parents greet me with embraces, having already settled Severus in an armchair. Their faces are the same as Harry's--sad and resigned. I smile at them, tell them that everything will work out. And it will. I've taken every possible precaution. From here, the two of us will simply disappear. Hermione Granger and Severus Snape will no longer exist; our papers will read 'Jane Griffen' and 'Sebastian Griffen'. I've decided on America; we'll be harder to track there. Witches have avoided the place since the Trials and the Native American shamans are decidedly... unwelcoming. Harry will clean up after us when we've gone.

Perhaps this is overkill. Perhaps nothing I do will bring him back to me. Perhaps there will never be anything more to Severus Snape than the empty shell that I keep by my side. But I can no longer do nothing, watch as the wizarding world does nothing. I have to try. I have to keep hope with me as long as I can.

And when even hope has gone, there are still two tiny glass vials, with their promise of release and eternal peace for both of us.

Author's Notes (12/11/04)

I thought to put these here this time so as not to interfere with the story. I'm not quite sure what I think of it; the first half went well, but the second rankles me a bit. I had thought to have them die--it would have been neater that way--but Hermione's character got in the way. I can't imagine her bowing out without at least one herculean effort to change things. And hope is a tricky beast--witness the fact that hope was included with the evils in Pandora's box. Still, the way it turned out... I may be forced to rewrite it sometime. Ah, yes, and points to those who recognize the beginning lyrics. I'll take old movies over shoddy remakes any day.