

~ Requiem ~

by Cheyne

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Disclaimer: None. Characters are all mine.

Rating: G

Summary: Story written for RAOB Bard Challenge #20. At her daughter's funeral, a mother blasts the hypocrisy of 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell.'

Three volleys from seven rifles split the silence of the crisp, fall morning. The gunshots caused the two women standing at the flag-draped casket to jump. The frightened little girl between them clung to the younger woman, who could not stem the flood of tears.

The military Honor Guard expertly folded the flag so only white stars on a blue background were showing. Chaplain Atwood, the local Army liaison, stood before the older woman.

"As a representative of the United States Army, it is my high privilege to present you this flag. Let it be a symbol of the grateful appreciation this nation feels for the distinguished service rendered to our country and our flag by your daughter, Staff Sergeant Alana Simoneau."

The older woman defiantly stared straight ahead. "Give it to my daughter-in-law," Robin Simoneau said through clenched teeth. "She's the rightful next-of-kin."

"Please, Mrs. Simoneau, you know I can't. In the eyes of the military, you are -"

"No!" Robin roared at him, startling the attendees and causing everyone to look. She snatched the flag from him and gave it to the distraught, auburn-haired woman next to her. "If any of you really felt a grateful appreciation for the distinguished service my daughter rendered, you would respect her memory by treating her wife as a grieving military spouse!"

"Mommy, why is Gramma yelling?"

Carly Metcalf-Simoneau picked up the three-year-old and held her tightly. "She's angry, baby." She kissed the little girl's forehead.

"Robin, this is not the time to make a scene," Atwood urged. "Alana could be removed from Arlington. Your granddaughter could lose all rights to any survivor benefits," he harshly whispered.

"Really, Gene?" She and the chaplain had gotten to know each other well in the past month. "How is that possible when no one asked and she didn't tell? Her best friend from the unit told me that everyone in the command knew but didn't care."

Atwood got defensive. "The commander doesn't speculate. All we knew was that she became a single mother and signed over responsibility of her child to a friend while she was deployed."

"Because that's what she officially had to do in the military of 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell'." She scanned everyone in uniform. "Susan told me you all ignored Alana's orientation because she was too valuable to lose; officially because of her Iraqi translation skills but really because she was the best sharpshooter in the unit and the most efficient at searching Iraqi women. As long as she was useful to you, her orientation didn't matter. Your hypocrisy sickens me."

A man wearing dress Greens with many ribbons on his chest and shiny silver eagles on his epaulets and beret approached them. His nameplate read 'Namora.' "Military regulations are very clear."

"They seem pretty blurred to me. She was allowed to die for her country but not to say goodbye to her spouse? She made the ultimate sacrifice, died a *hero* yet you're threatening me with taking away rights she *earned* by fighting and dying for her country? And the military repays her by not allowing her family to receive the same benefits, rights and rewards her straight peers are awarded?"

"Excuse me, Mrs. Simoneau? I'm -"

"Which Mrs. Simoneau are you addressing, Colonel?" Robin snapped.

"The only one the military recognizes, Ma'am. Now, I understand you are grief-stricken and emotions are very high but -"

"Did you even know my daughter?" Robin asked.

"Not personally."

"Then why are you here? No, I know why. It's your job. You've done your duty, you can go now."

The colonel looked appalled at being dismissed. "Mrs. Simoneau, your daughter knew the rules and -"

"Loved her country enough to enlist anyway. She was expected to protect the Constitutional rights of others, rights that she wasn't allowed to enjoy for herself or her family. My God, she wasn't even allowed to publicly say goodbye to Carly when she was deployed. She was trusted and respected enough to lead her team into hostile territory, good enough to be sacrificed for a cause that was nothing more than a president's folly but you deny her the right to provide her family with the same dignity, respect and openness other less productive, unqualified soldiers are allowed? That somehow the contribution of the homosexual lives given to defend this country is less than that of heterosexual GIs?"

"Mrs. Simoneau -"

"Let me finish! When those insurgents ambushed her on one of those Team Lioness missions, you notified *me*, not Carly. You paid for *my* flight to Germany but not hers. So *I* paid her way. And then you bastards wouldn't even let her into see her dying wife! Do you think it was *me* Alana asked for when she drew her last breath? You denied them both the right to see each other for the last time. What gives you the right to decide who the most appropriate person is in those circumstances? Shouldn't that be up to the dying soldier?"

"You people are pathetic! My daughter-in-law suffered the same spousal hardships as other military wives. She has also uprooted her life and moved every time Alana was reassigned, also put her career second to her military spouse's. Do you think it was easy for her to listen to other military spouses expressing pride and fear and concern while she had to stay silent, even though she felt those same emotions? Because a slip up to the wrong person could cause them to lose everything they had worked so hard together to build."

"Ma'am, it's the way things are," Namora said.

"But not the way they should be. Hopefully, by the time my daughter-in-law dies, her epitaph will be allowed on my daughter's tombstone and my granddaughter will be able to openly honor her family as equally as everyone else. Until then don't presume to honor my daughter's memory. You haven't earned that right."

The End

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