

Reincarnation

by *chivalric*

It begins with a kitten, but it doesn't end with a snake. Actually, the snake is the trigger for a new beginning.

One Shot

Chapter 1 of 1

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Thanks, hugs, and kisses to my wonderful betas, Arabella Bloodgood and notsosaintly. *hugs the both of you*

This story is for ladyofthemasque. I promised her a while ago to write a cat-story. So here you go, dear - I hope you like it!



Fuck, thought Severus Snape and flicked his tail. *It's not enough to be reborn as a cat, of all damn creatures, it had to be a worthless kitten! How unbelievably, fucking embarrassing!*

Couldn't it have been something decent like... like... Well, anything but a fluffy furball?

Licking his tail was fun, though. Chasing it, biting it, and trying to kill it even more.

Then he realized that a Potions master and former Death Eater wouldn't do such a silly thing as chasing a tail, not even one's own tail and definitely not after one had just died. *Stop chasing that tail!* he scolded himself and managed to keep his paws under control. With as much dignity as possible which wasn't much given the fact that he

was a damn kitten Snape lowered his bottom onto his hind legs and tried to figure out what had happened.

Well, he had died, of course. That much was obvious. No one survived an attack from Nagini, the Dark Lord's pet snake. She was enormous, she was fast, and her poison was deathly. *Should have kept a Bezoar in my pockets*, Snape thought and shifted his weight a bit in order to be able to lick his paw. *Actually, I should have been intelligent enough to see that attack coming. Dying on a dusty floor, killed by a damn reptile. Fucking shitty day, honestly.*

In addition, there was now this lousy cat problem as well.

Usually, he didn't swear. Not often, anyway. But in the form of a cat kitten! he found it hard not to swear.

He was still in the Shrieking Shack, it was still night, and Snape guessed he hadn't died too long ago. Sniffing his cooling, already decaying body was a scary experience. He smelled... bad. Like dead flesh, like fear and pain. He could smell the blood and sweat and unwashed hair. A rather nasty combination, come to think of it. But then, being in the Dark Lord's service had meant being alert day and night, and personal hygiene had been at the end of his daily list of tasks to be performed. 'Wash your hair' had been utterly unimportant compared with 'Survive the day'.

Pity he hadn't managed even that.

Right. Snape circled the body, his body, one last time, urinated with quivering tail on the spot where Nagini had been and where he could still sense her dry, alien fragrance, then stalked out of the Shrieking Shack into the night. Better to leave this place. Better to find shelter and food and a place to sleep before someone considered the presence of a cat on the battlefield as odd and killed him again.

Silently, he set one paw in front of the other, trying to figure out how to walk with four legs instead of the usual two. It wasn't easy, that much was certain. Occasionally, those four legs decided to jump at leaves, hop over tree trunks or even claw at bats passing by. Those four legs were infuriating they didn't even allow him to stalk properly, and they insisted on slinking along in a ridiculously cute sort of way when not interrupted by periods of tail-chasing or paw-licking.

Suddenly, he stopped. Why the hell had he gone into the Forbidden Forest? There wouldn't be food, there wouldn't be shelter, and he was definitely too small to stand a chance against any of the creatures living in the wood. He was a damn kitten, for Merlin's sake, and by the looks of it, Fate hadn't even granted him black fur.

All right, he was partly black, as far as he could tell. His tail was black, his front and hind legs as well, and his body, too. At least most of it. But there was white as well. Each paw was shiny white, the tip of his tail, and his belly, too... Great. A black cat with white patches. He was a clown cat.

Correction: *kitten*.

If only he could have snorted. But no, all that came out was a *Meow*, and it sounded small and... cute.

If he wasn't careful, someone would find him and he shuddered cuddle him.

Huh. Maybe he should have died properly instead of trying to perform that Reincarnation Spell. With his last bit of breath, after his mad-as-a-hatter master and his killer snake had been gone and after he had given his most private memories to the Potter brat and after the children had left him behind, assuming him to be dead, he had murmured the spell.

Somehow he had expected to be reborn in his own body, not in the body of an animal. Why it had to be this animal out of all possible animals available was a riddle to him, too. Why not a... a centaur? A hawk? The latter would have perfectly fitted him, thank you very much, and he could have flown out of this blasted forest with all its horrible shadows and noises and things.

Time to admit the truth: the kitten was lonely and scared. It was hungry as well, but earlier on, when a mouse had appeared only a foot away, it had jumped and run away. Fine, the mouse had been big, and it had looked nasty and aggressive, but still, shouldn't a cat be able to kill a mouse? Even a tiny little cat like him?

Apparently not. This little cat craved company. He wanted people and light and a soft cushion to sleep on. He dreamed of milk or, even better, cream; he craved chicken, and most importantly, he longed for someone who would stroke him and love him and call him sweetie.

Disgusting. He, Severus Snape, was a solitary man. He disliked people, he hated company, stroking was out of the question, and soft cushions had no place in his dungeons. He was tall and bony, and no one would ever as much as think of cuddling him.

The cat... the kitten... All right, *he* sat down again and meowed, loud and clear in the night air. It sounded awfully lost and lonely. It was a heartbreaking sound.

Snape couldn't believe he was making it. He couldn't stop doing it, though. It seemed as if his new body had needs of its own and that he, the spirit, the brain inside this body, had to accept it. Like now, he wanted to wash his face. Lick the paw, drag it across his face. Lick it and drag it over his ears. Lick it for an eternity, then rub it in his eyes.

Hell, he possibly had never been this clean in his life. His other life, that was.

He certainly hadn't licked his bits back then, either.

Snape shivered in the cool air. Was he already adjusting to this stupid little body? Was he... accepting that he was now a very young, very silly cat, that he had no voice and no hands left to wield magic, that he had no strength, no power? That he was cute and furry and able to scare birds very small birds instead of students?

An owl flew by and had a closer look at the little cat, swooshing low through the Forbidden Forest, maybe even considering the kitten a worthy midnight snack.

Snape jumped and ran. He ran like a flash of lightning, ran until he was out of the forest, dashed through the bushes until he saw Hogwarts and heard the cheers and the cries. Without thinking, he made it through the broken front doors, through the corridors, and down the stairs until he had reached his private rooms deep down in the dungeons.

So much for chasing birds.

And his doors didn't open, either.

Shit. Of course, the wards wouldn't recognise their master in his new form, and they certainly wouldn't let him in, however demanding his "Meow!" might be. As a human, he had disliked cats. As a cat, he couldn't even get into his own chambers anymore.

Sigh.

Snape gave up. Curling around himself, he dropped on the spot and was asleep before his tail properly covered his tiny little nose.

"Goodness, what are you doing here, sweetie? It's cold and dark, and a little kitten shouldn't be in these nasty dungeons!" The voice was laced with surprise and fatigue and something else, too. Concern, maybe? Concern at the fact that a little cat was down here all alone?

Before Snape could turn around to see who had found him, he felt himself lifted up and pressed against a quickly beating heart. Still sleepy, he tried to rub his eyes and found he only had paws to do so. Struggling, he had to experience the unhappy sensation of getting carried away against his will, too small and too weak to do anything

about it.

"Meow?" he asked, wanting to know who was carrying him and why this someone considered his beloved dungeons a bad place for a kitten. There were rats down there, spiders as big as apples, a snake here and there, cobwebs and flies...

Come to think of it, maybe it was a good idea to leave the darkness behind. After all, he didn't weigh more than a small bag of cornflakes. Fighting with a rat more than three times his size might have been embarrassingly fatal. He had died once already; he had no intention to experience that sensation again.

This someone, this human who carried him, was warm and soft with a tender voice and slender fingers. The very fingers stroking him ran along his spine, tickled him under the chin and behind his ears. Impertinent behaviour, of course, as he was one of the most powerful wizards in the world and she yes, it was definitely a girl was nothing more than a student.

On the other hand, she didn't know whose belly she was scratching. To her, he was just a kitten, small and forlorn and needing to be saved from the dangers of the world. Besides, it was surprisingly cosy in her arms. Maybe, just maybe, he would allow her to continue stroking him for a little while longer.

Had he... He hadn't just purred, had he? Good grief, why couldn't he have been reborn as a cockroach!

Step by step she carried him through Hogwarts, and he took the opportunity to have a look around. There was a lot of damage, people were crying for their lost loved ones, and Minerva was commanding people around, as usual. Potter, sitting at a table, head covered by his arms, looked like death as well.

His girl, the one who carried him, stepped closer to the sleeping boy and put a hand on his shoulder, shaking him gently. "Harry," she whispered. "Harry, you need to go to the infirmary. Please, Harry!"

The boy looked up, and Snape was shocked at how awful he looked. Deep, dark rings were under his eyes, his face was grey from fatigue, and he seemed unaware of the tears that were streaming down his cheeks. "So many died, Hermione," he whispered. "How shall I... How shall we get on from here?"

The girl Hermione Granger, apparently pressed him a little closer against her chest, and he didn't mind. Indeed, many had died. He could not only see that, but smell it as well. Death lingered in every corner of the Great Hall, although the roof had been broken and a cold wind blew through the ancient stones.

A deep sigh emerged from the girl, and she reached out to brush her hand across Harry's unruly hair. "Voldemort is dead, Harry. That is all that counts. You killed him; you gave all of us a future. And now you will come to the infirmary with me. Madam Pomfrey will give you a sleeping draught, and when you wake up, things will look better." Tugging at the boy's hand, she managed to pull him to his feet and then led him upstairs to the infirmary as promised. But she never once let go of the little black kitten with white paws, who clung to her and quietly, gently, and comfortably purred against her throat.

After Potter was safely tucked into bed, Hermione Disapparated with him, away from Hogwarts, away from destruction and death. She brought him to a small house with a huge garden, a house that smelled old and cosy, empty and welcoming at the same time. *Her parents' house*, Snape thought. *Her parents, who are in Australia with their memories Obliviated. Can't be easy for her to be here.*

And since when did it bother him if his students felt well or not?

Hermione took him to the kitchen, and only then did he feel the hollow ache in his stomach. He was painfully hungry and more than grateful that the girl obviously was planning to feed him. Sitting on the counter, he watched her look into the larder, which was naturally empty, as was the fridge and every single cupboard. Finally, she decided to use her wand to conjure breakfast not only for him but for herself as well.

Who would have thought that raw flesh sprinkled with some cat titbits could taste so delicious? Crunch, crunch, the food was gone faster than he could eat, but she was generous and filled up his saucer a second time and placed another one with watery milk next to his paws as well. Casually, she stroked along his back, and he felt said back arch against her palm and heard a hearty purr emerge from his throat.

Damn, he thought whilst devouring his food. *I'm enjoying this. Finally, someone who touches me without hesitation!*

After breakfast she didn't have more than a bite of toast and half a cup of tea she took him upstairs into a bright room with lots of books and a small bed. Her childhood room, quite obviously, as there was a huge teddy bear sitting on the pillow. Some of the books were children books, some looked like schoolbooks, and he would have smiled at that with appreciation had he been able to smile. So instead, he turned to look at her, trying to show her how much it soothed him to see a small part of his world, the wizarding world, in this Muggle household only to see her fast asleep on her bed, still dressed, very dirty, and her clothes ripped and torn from the fight.

Surprisingly enough, his cold and black heart melted at this sight. Padding closer on his tiny paws, tail high in the air, he hopped onto the bed and pressed his nose against her cheek. His belly was full, it had been not the most comfortable night, and he had slept neither much nor well... Neatly he rolled up next to her head, feeling her breath in his fur, and dozed off.

She woke in the afternoon, not really refreshed, but at least less tired. Stretching, she sighed at her aching shoulders, the nasty smell of sweat and blood that oozed from her clothes, and the general feeling of loss and fear.

"It's over," she murmured to herself. "Voldemort is dead, Harry is alive, and it is really, really over!"

Just as she tried to get up, she saw the little black fur ball she had found the previous day in front of Professor Snape's rooms. He was fast asleep, tiny, and impeccable, and when she brushed her fingertip over his white whiskers, he sleepily pawed at her before going back to dreamland. "Cutie," she murmured and decided that it was more than time to have a shower. "I'll leave you here, but if you nibble my books, I'll slap your booty."

On the way to the bathroom, she shed her dirty, crumpled clothes one by one until she was naked. The tiles on the floor were cold, and she hurried to step under the hot stream. Luckily, she had bought the essentials soap and shampoo during her last visit more than six months ago. So she was able to wash herself thoroughly, scrubbing away the blood, the dirt, and the tears from her face, and after more than half an hour, she finally began to feel clean again. Clean and warm. Her hair smelled of honey, her skin of sweet vanilla, and the towel was big and fluffy when she wrapped it around her body.

Shivering, she hurried back into the bedroom. Her wardrobe contained her normal clothes, the ones she couldn't wear at Hogwarts. Grateful, she slipped on jeans and a light jumper it wasn't warm enough for early June, but then, it didn't really bother her. She had the strange feeling that even if it had been hot outside, she would have preferred to put on warmer clothes. The shivers that claimed her came from deep inside, caused by too many horrible hours, weeks, and months.

Suddenly, she looked up and saw the tiny black and white cat staring at her with big, black eyes that matched his fur. He sat in the middle of her bed, not moving an inch and looking like a statue.

Until he yawned, hugely, and flicked his tail. "Meow?" he said, and for some reason, Hermione had a strong feeling that it had been a question, really, a question she needed to answer.

Instead, she shook her head, scolding herself for having such stupid ideas. Being used to a Kneazle for a familiar, she tended to think of animals as a different sort of human a silly thing, she knew, but then, this little black one looked at her so intently...

"What's your name, anyway?" she asked the black and white cat and sat down to pull on some socks. "Considering the fact that I found you in the dungeons, in the centre of Slytherin territory, and right in front of Professor Snape's door, I guess you should have a name beginning with an S."

"Rrrrraul," said the kitten and jumped off the bed. Slowly, as if he expected her to run away from him at any moment, he came closer, and a little bit closer still, until he was near enough to rub his head against her shin. In circles, he wove his way between her feet, in and out, until he stopped and jumped. Landing on her lap, purring hesitantly, he stared at her once more.

"You are... different, aren't you?" Hermione said, frowning. Showing him her empty hands, waiting until he had sniffed each single finger, she only then began to gently scratch him behind his ears. "I think Sammy would be a good name for you. Begins with an S. And you are so shy, little one! As if you aren't used to getting stroked. As if you were afraid of people."

The kitten purred a bit louder and arched his back against her open palm.

"Well, you are definitely not shy of me," she said with a smile and placed him on her desk amongst open books and parchments and quills. "Look, why don't you read a bit whilst I prepare breakfast for the both of us?"

He couldn't believe it he was still able to read! Being a cat might have influenced his ability to talk, but his eyesight was as perfect as ever. The letters in the open books made sense; they merged into sentences and the sentences into spells. *I'm sitting on a Potions book*, Snape realised and quickly got up so his paws wouldn't crumple the pages. *Well, let's see if I can't find a potion that will give me back human form.*

On the other hand, he had to admit that being a kitten had its benefits. First, the girl wasn't scared of him, a surprisingly pleasurable feeling. He hadn't known how much it bothered him to be the most hated man in the school until today, until he wasn't anymore. This girl Granger, Hermione Granger had seen him, had taken pity on him, and had decided to take care of him simply because she was a nice girl and because she had no reason to fear him. He not only hadn't been able to sneer at her or to scold her he hadn't wanted to, either. She had found him and saved him, and he had fallen asleep next to her on her bed. This morning, he had seen her naked, her skin still wet from the shower, and he had been shocked at her beauty. Not that he desired her he was a kitten and, besides, more than twice her age but it had deeply worried him that apparently he seemed to have forgotten how beautiful youth and innocence could be. She hadn't been shy, not in the least, and had dropped the towel as if she were alone in the room.

Well, he was a kitten. Girls weren't bothered if kittens watched them getting dressed.

Absent-mindedly, he licked his paw and washed his face. Then his eyes fell on another book, hidden under a Muggle novel with the ridiculous title "Golden Fool" by one Robin Hobb.

It the hidden book, not the Muggle one was about Reincarnation. It was a book from Hogwarts' library, it was a book out of the Restricted Section, it was exactly the book he needed, and as the Muggle book was in the way, he pushed it aside until it landed on the floor with a heavy thump. The Reincarnation book was what he needed, and opening it was easy as it was a thin book with a thin, light cover.

Runes glowed in the sunlight, and Snape could faintly hear the girl rummaging in the kitchen. Runes whispered spells into his kitten ears, and his purring stopped when he flicked the first page, using his claws to turn the parchment. He became very interested in the literature, too intrigued by the prospect of what he was reading. Well, she had told him to read, hadn't she?

Goodness, it was that easy to mess up a reincarnation? It went wrong 99.9% of the time? Damn, had he known that, he wouldn't have tried it!

According to the book, most people who used the Reincarnation Spell died doing so. In this light, he had done rather well. The ones who did survive the magic usually ended up as something insensate, like a stone, a fallen tree, or even a leaf or the leg of a dung beetle. Never in their own body. Never, ever.

Only very, very few managed to be reborn as something that breathed an animal, mostly, although usually something smaller than a cat. Or even a kitten.

Considerably smaller. The average body of a reborn person was no taller than 1.5 inches.

A mouse. Most people who managed it were reborn as mice!

Snape shuddered. Considering this, a kitten was very close to victory!

Ah, here came the bit about reclaiming a human body.

Dead, he read.

Decaying, he saw.

One week the words jumped out at him, and Snape gasped, which wasn't easy to do as a kitten.

He had just one week, beginning with his death hour, to get back into his body. After that, the body might still react, but he would be a zombie and would lose limbs if he weren't careful.

He doubted he would be allowed to teach while being a zombie, and without teaching, he would be unable to pay his bills.

Damn, bloody bullshit.

Silently, he counted up to ten until his nerves had calmed. He had died late last night, around midnight, he guessed. He had wandered the woods a bit and found his way back to Hogwarts where the girl had found him. They had slept, and now it was already the next day.

One worthless, small week. Less than seven days now. How on earth was he going to manage to brew this potion in such short a time with paws instead of hands, without a wand, and with a suspicious girl around?

Not good. One week was nearly nothing. He would need to make it clear to the girl that he needed her help. Possibly, she wouldn't allow him near her books, fearing he would tear them to pieces...

"You know, I was making a joke when I said you should read a book, Sammy," her voice said, and Snape nearly fell off the table he hadn't heard her coming.

Her eyebrows were drawn together. *Bad sign*, Snape thought desperately and stepped away from the book. Very slowly, he then reached out with one paw and closed it.

Bad idea, he realised a moment later when her eyes grew big. In her hands, she held a tray with tea and breakfast and a little saucer with milk for him. He could smell it, the milk. His stomach rumbled.

"Sammy," she said, carefully placing the tray on the table. "Have you been reading this book?"

"Meow," he said, denying everything, and flicked his tail. How he longed to be able to say, "Don't be ridiculous, I'm a kitten. How on earth would I be able to read a book?"

He hoped his meow had successfully conveyed the message. Trying to move like a kitten moving gracefully without his usual stalk, that was he made his way to the tray and sniffed the tea, milk, and toast.

Hermione picked up the book and flicked through the pages. "Reincarnation?" she murmured. "Spells to bring back the dead; zombies; mice. Hmmm."

Snape felt his fur stand up at this "Hmmm". *Why the hell did she have to be so bright?* he mused, and then, *Why did I have to end up with her and not... someone, anyone else?*

Because, he realised, no one else would have cared for a kitten after the night of the final battle. A kitten was unimportant, nothing worth bothering with, a nuisance one was better off without. There were friends to be buried and relatives to take care of. Who would pick up a small, lost kitten at such a time?

She would. This girl cared for house-elves, for pixies, for ghosts, dragons, half-giants, and very obviously for cats as well. Didn't she have a feline familiar, a big, orange tomcat? Crookshanks?

"Tell me, Sammy, can you read?" she asked idly, and the question came so unexpectedly that Snape shook his head viciously before he could stop himself.

She grinned triumphantly. "And of course you can't understand me, either. Aha. Sammy, my dear, I believe you are a lot more interesting than you seemed to be at first sight."

Shit, Snape thought and decided, as it was too late for denial anyway, to lick the milk before she decided to ask more questions.

She didn't ask, though. They had breakfast together, and although Snape could feel her gaze upon him every now and then, she didn't talk again. She seemed to be lost in thought, and when she had drunk the last cup of tea, she got up and packed a few things in her bag. "Sorry, Sammy, but I need to go back to Hogwarts for a while. Behave yourself, will you?" And with that she was gone.

Snape couldn't believe his luck he had her room to himself as well as the book she had left. Maybe he could organise a few potion ingredients whilst she was gone.

Thought done. He walked through the house, found mice hair and spider legs and even a little something that might be pixie tears. They lived everywhere, those pixies, even in Muggle houses.

Getting the things up to Hermione's room was harder than he thought it would be he missed his hands, and he wanted to swear several times as he tried to scrape the mouse hair off his tongue.

She had a cauldron, and he managed to get the first step of the potion done without too much trouble. Given the outcome, brewing this potion was ridiculously simple, even for a cat without a wand. Problem was how to get the rest of the ingredients, the ones that were only to be found in his private store room at Hogwarts. Maybe he should try to communicate with the girl. Maybe he should let her know who he was...

No. Definitely not. He didn't know how she would react to such a revelation, but he knew with certainty that she had disliked him in his human form. Better to let her believe he was an extremely bright kitten. Better she continued stroking him instead of kicking him out of her home. He would be lost out there, he knew it. Dogs would chase him, cars would run him over, and he might end up in an animal shelter... Urgh. Horrible thought.

Besides, sleeping in her bed had been... nice. Pleasant. She had been warm, smelled of vanilla and honey, and the way she stroked him. *Hmm. Better not think about the way she strokes*, he thought and jumped onto the table, looking for the book.

It became clear pretty quickly that in the end, he would need a wand to finish the potion, and he would need to find his body as well. The potion would allow him to get back into his human form, but only if there was a human form available.

Just one more problem. He doubted that they had left his corpse in the Shrieking Shack, not with Harry *bloody* Potter knowing about his past. Why the hell had he given the boy his most precious memories?

Ah, yes, because it had been necessary. Without the memories, the boy wouldn't have been able to face death, wouldn't have dared to walk right into the Dark Lord's trap. Without him, Severus Snape, this war would have been lost, and possibly, everyone knew about it by now.

Therefore, they would give him a proper burial in a nice, big coffin. With a nice, heavy tombstone covering his grave.

Impossible for a kitten to lift an obsidian stone, not with paws, not with muscles the strength of cooked spaghetti.

Just when Snape realised that his hopes to get his body back were in vain, just when he hung his head and tried to imagine living on as a cat, the door opened and Hermione was back. Tears were streaming down her face, and dry sobs emerged from her throat. Heavily, she sat on the bed, her bag lying forgotten on the floor. She had been gone for just a few hours, so what the hell could have devastated her so badly?

Forgetting about his own problems, Snape jumped off the table and onto the bed. His small, cool nose nudged her fingertips, and he began to purr.

When was the last time he had given comfort to anyone?

Come to think of it had he ever comforted anyone at all? Lily had never needed his comfort. She had had a family, friends, she was well liked amongst the students, and she had been strong. Too strong for tears. He had never needed to comfort her when they both had been children.

Today, in this small room, Snape found that giving comfort was something that warmed his heart.

She sobbed so very loudly, and her shoulders shook, and tears fell onto her trousers. Both hands were clutched in front of her face; she trembled, shivered, and all Snape could do was to edge a little closer, to press his warm, furry body against her leg.

Desperately, she reached out and buried her fingers in his fur. It hurt, but he just purred.

"So many dead," she whispered hoarsely. "Fred Weasley I didn't know about him. And Remus and Tonks. They just buried them. Professor McGonagall said it would be best to rest the dead as quickly as possible. I attended four burials in the past four hours. Too much. Way too much!"

Pulling up her knees, she hugged herself with one arm. Her other hand, though, continued stroking the little black and white cat.

"And Professor Snape... He was on our side the entire time and I didn't know it. No one knew. He gave his life for us and... and..."

Snape couldn't stand it. Sharply, he clawed at her and sunk his teeth into her hand.

"Ouch!" she exclaimed, visibly shocked at his attack. "What did you do that for?"

He hopped off the bed and onto the table again. When she didn't follow, he pushed the book over the edge. It landed with a small 'thud' on the ground.

Wiping her tears with the sleeve of her blouse, she hesitantly got up, took the book, and placed it on the table again. "Reincarnation?" she asked, her eyes wide. "Are you

telling me you... you are..."

"Meow," he said, loud and clear.

"You are a reincarnated human?"

Nodding seemed the better action here. It was a much clearer answer.

"Someone I knew?"

Ah, tricky. Of course she had known him, but he didn't want her to know it. So he shook his head and nodded at the same time, his new body not obeying him as precisely as he would have wished.

She made her own conclusion of this. "You say I knew you but didn't know you at the same time? That means you were acting, pretending to be someone you weren't?"

Beardy Merlin's balls, the girl was bright!

"You are Sammy, are you telling me that you are..." She gulped and sat down. Looked at him so intently that he had the impression she could see right through him, directly into his black soul.

"Professor Snape?" she breathed, and he couldn't help but flinch. Why had he ended up in the hands of the brightest witch of her age?

"Holy shit," she said with feeling. "Now what? You want to brew this potion? Hang on, let me read this." Pulling the book onto her lap, she summoned a quill and took notes whilst she read. "One week... Decay... Unicorn blood... Touch the body... What?"

He jumped when suddenly her strokes stopped. Her hand in his fur felt heavenly, and it was amazing that she could rub a kitten while taking notes at the same time. Amazing creatures, women.

"We need to get your body out of the grave?" A slightly horrific subnote rang in her voice. "But you are buried. You are dead. I mean you expect this potion will reunite you with... with your corpse?"

Put like that, it indeed sounded horrible. But he nodded. He didn't want to be a cat all his life. And hopefully, he wouldn't stay a corpse once his spirit was back inside his hopefully not too rotten flesh.

"You are Professor Snape, and you want me to brew this potion and then take you to the graveyard where I have to dig out your body, and then the potion will work and you will be alive again?" This time, she sounded incredulous. Well, she had just phrased out the most idiotic idea thinkable.

"Meow," he said with as much dignity as possible. After all, he had no choice.

They worked hard, many long hours every day. No one disturbed them, and she had even placed her Kneazle with Harry and Ginny. "Easier for the both of us if you don't have to get into cat fights," she had explained dryly, and he had been grateful. He knew her cat. Crookshanks would have slaughtered him with a flick of his ear.

The potion turned out to be useless three times in a row simply because Hermione didn't know how to brew it and because it was more complicated than she had expected. The frustrated looks of Snape the kitten didn't help, either. Nor did his padding up and down the table, the impatient flicks of his tail, or his occasional snarls.

"I guess this potion is easy to brew when one is a Potion master," she snapped after having cleaned out the cauldron once more. "It isn't for me, though. How about some help, little kitten? Show me you can do more than lick up cream!"

Indignantly, he considered leaving the room, then thought better of it. She had done her best, and she was very good. This potion was indeed tricky to brew, he remembered now. Therefore, when she began anew, he sat beside her and watched, nudged her when it was time to stir and growled when she was about to add the mandrakes too early. At the critical point, he took the wand from her, holding it between his teeth. Three taps instead of three counter stirs, and the potion was ready to simmer for twenty-four hours.

They had dinner together, and she was in a talkative mood. Although she knew now who he was, she was still friendly; although she knew his name, she still called him Sammy.

"It's easier this way," she explained to him now and gave him the last bite of the chicken. "Thinking of you as being Professor Snape would make it impossible for me to do this. I mean, I know you are him, but... Damn. It's hard to explain. I like cats. I really like you. I guess that sums it up pretty nicely."

He nearly choked at her words. She liked him? *Him?* The dungeon bat, the greasy git, the traitor and spy and Death Eater?

Maybe he should keep the kitten body. It was nice to be liked for a change.

And it was extremely nice to sleep next to her at night. Not only nice, if he was honest with himself. Mandatory, necessary, important whatever he called it, it was true. Not that he hadn't tried to sleep on the floor, curled up in a corner of her room. Or on the windowsill. Neither place had worked, though. Her room seemed darker than the Forbidden Forest, the floor was cold and hard, the windowsill too small and frankly, he was scared to death to be all alone, so far away from her and her heartbeat, which thumped so reassuringly in his oversensitive ears. The only option had been to sleep next to her, if he wanted to get some sleep at all. Occasionally, she would reach out at night and touch his fur with her fingertips, as if she knew he was lonely and longed for human touch.

So he slept on her bed, next to her head, bathing in her warmth and feeling... well, loved, he guessed, but didn't dare to think it aloud.

It was so easy to like her. She was not only friendly, she had a sense of humour, too, and she was very skilled in what she did. No one else none of his students could have brewed the potion, and none of them would have accepted that he was alive as easily as she had.

She was beautiful as well. Why had he never seen this before? Her hair was soft and of a wonderful, gleaming chestnut colour, her figure slender and female at the same time, her movements precise and effective. She talked a lot, true, but never nonsense, and her voice was warm and deeper than one would expect at first sight. When they ate together, he sat on the table opposite of her. She smiled often and told him bits and bobs of gossip she had heard. He loved it. No one had ever told him gossip out of the sheer joy of sharing naughty little stories about others as he had been the spy, everyone had always been eager not to talk to him at all. Being with her was so very pleasant, and it surprised him that it was so very easy for him to enjoy her company.

He actually regretted the moment when she finished the potion. He regretted having to leave this house, her parents' house, and her room he had felt safe in.

It meant he would have to leave her, and he disliked that fact. As a man, as himself, she wouldn't wish to dine with him, talk with him, to be in his company. Or allow him to sleep in her bed any longer. He would miss her.

Shit, shit, shit!

But there was no choice, if he didn't want to stay a kitten. If he didn't want to grow into a big, black-and-white tomcat, this had to be done.

They arrived at the graveyard an hour before midnight, and Snape shivered in the night air. So did she in the past six days, he had learned to read her body language, and at the moment, she was scared.

Ever the brave Gryffindor, she picked him up and carried him past tombstones of people he had known, past Dumbledore's grave, past the final resting-place of students he had taught only a few weeks ago. It was a sad walk, and for once, she didn't say a word.

Until they reached his grave. "Here we are," she murmured. "This is where your body is buried. And if you are nothing but a kitten after all, if you are not Professor Snape, I will break your neck."

Reassuringly, Snape rubbed his head along her chin. If this worked, he wouldn't be able to touch her again. She would shy away from him, would dislike him as she always had, and so he enjoyed the closeness they were sharing right now even more. Then he jumped to the ground and sat next to his grave, covered with a huge, heavy, black stone. Flat on the ground it laid, six feet long and four feet wide, his name engraved on it in white letters.

He waited for her to lift the stone, to open his coffin so he could take the potion, touch his body, and get done with it.

Only that it didn't work. The heavy stone that protected his corpse didn't move when she spoke the spell, although she said it correctly and without hesitation.

Saying the spell again didn't change anything. The stone stayed where it was clearly, someone had used a lot of magic to make sure no one would desecrate his final resting place.

Unfortunately, if he couldn't get at least close to his body, he couldn't claim it as his, and there was only one hour left precisely at midnight one week ago, he had died. One more hour, and it was either cat or zombie.

Snape thought fast. Hermione was unable to get the stone out of the way. That meant... Yes. If his body couldn't be brought up, he needed to get down to his body. Simple. He just needed to turn into something smaller, something that could move in the earth, at least for a little while...

"A snake!" Hermione exclaimed quietly as if she had read his thoughts. "I need to turn you into a snake. Like that, you can get close enough to yourself that the potion will work. I mean, it is not absolutely necessary that you touch the body, is it? It will work with the coffin between you and... erm, you?"

The moon shone through the branches, a soft breeze played with her hair, and Snape just nodded. He didn't know if it would work. Not like that. But he would try. Time was running out, and he owed her at least a try.

He nodded, and she flicked her wand. A Transfiguration Spell hit him, and he shrank, lost his fur, his claws, and the long, white whiskers. Instead, he grew scales, became long and thin and slithering, had fangs now, and he would have shuddered if he had been able to. A snake had killed him. How appropriate that a snake's body would give him a chance to live again.

Hermione pulled out the phial with the potion, poured the liquid into a saucer, and put it onto the ground. With his now split tongue he licked it up, drop by drop. Luckily, it wasn't much.

"Hurry, Severus," she whispered, pushing him along with one cool fingertip. That she used his real name now was strangely reassuring. Slithering along the black stone, he went up to the place where his head would be and pushed his thin, scaled body between stone and earth without any problems. Obviously, the magic that hindered the stone to be moved couldn't hinder a grass snake to get underneath it.

Luckily.

Wriggling and fighting against the soil, Snape couldn't help but think that being a kitten hadn't been that bad at all, and then he was under the stone that covered his coffin and went deeper into the earth.

Dark. Worms. Ants. Beetles. Sounds of tiny insects munching along in the wet ground. The feeling of weight, the weight of earth, all around him. A claustrophobic experience, and if he hadn't been so determined, he would have turned, up to the light again, up to her.

Deeper into the ground he went. It was not entirely silent in the darkness. He didn't know if he was heading into the right direction, either.

Then he sensed something wooden right in front of him, something hard, something big. His coffin. With his body inside.

Just in time. The potion was working now; he could feel it. The small snake began to lose substance, became thin and weak as mist. Bones melted, and flesh and nerves turned into nothing until only his spirit was left, the bit that was him and only him. He was not bound to a body any longer, neither cat nor snake, and what was left drifted towards his dead, cold form, discarding the wooden barrier between himself and his body as unimportant.

He seeped into something icy, something still, something... well, dead. Something that smelled bad and felt even worse. Was that his head, so heavy and covered with a cloth? How could he be in pain when he was dead? Why was it so dark in here, and where was here, anyway?

He felt his fingers tingle and his toes. He felt his lungs take a deep breath and he felt his eyelids twitch. His nostrils flared and good gods, he smelled rotten!

He was rotten. A week in the grave certainly hadn't done his appearance any good.

He struggled. Fought. Bumped with hands and feet and forehead against the walls of his coffin.

Too tight. Not enough space. No air.

His body changed from dead to alive. Sunken cheeks filled out. Decayed skin healed. Muscles tightened. In his mouth, he felt saliva, and he swallowed hard to get rid of the taste of death.

Still no air. He banged against his cage now, the coffin that kept him underground. If he didn't get some fresh air soon, he would die.

Unacceptable. He had died once; he wouldn't die again because of a lousy coffin, a bit of earth, and an unyielding tombstone.

Fumbling in the darkness, trying to master his ice-cold hands, he searched for his wand and found it on his chest. *Bless you, Minerva*, he thought, because surely it had been her who had insisted that he was buried with his wand.

One flick, and he heard a small explosion, knowing that he had just destroyed the stone.

Next came the coffin, and this was really easy as it was made of wood. Earth rained down on his face, and he gasped, covered his eyes, and tried to get up.

More earth. His wand slipped out of his numb fingers, and in a panic, he began to dig, shoving away wooden planks and soil and the worms which had possibly already been looking forward to feasting on his flesh. His legs were weak, his neck where Nagini had bitten him hurt, and he was about to drown in his own grave. Drowning in earth, drowning whilst trying to get to the surface.

His fingernails broke, the fingertips ripped open. He didn't care. He needed to get out of this grave, his grave, before death pulled him back into the black abyss.

His will to live was strong, though. Over the years, he had survived more than one attempt to kill him; snarling, he decided that definitely, he would survive a bit of dirt in his

mouth. Angry, furious, and terrified, he thrust his arms up, brought his legs underneath him and shoved the earth that had covered his coffin aside with his shoulders, and then he felt hands touching his, grabbing him, pulling him out of his grave and into the night, into the air, back into life.

Gasping, he laid on the soft grass, shaking, crying. His head rested in Hermione's lap; she brushed dirt off his face and held him close, held him tight, and was just there whilst he tried to comprehend that it had worked.

Finally, he turned to his side and spat out half a worm. "I need a shower," he croaked, and then he laughed at the absurdity of this statement. He was alive and not alone who cared if he was clean?

Naturally, Hermione never married Ron Weasley. They were not made for each other, and the one kiss they had shared couldn't change that fact. Although they stayed friends, Ron never understood how she could love a man who had crawled out of a grave, and not even Ron knew why Hermione called her husband "Sammy" every now and then.

□

I used the following prompts:

55. It begins with kittens. It ends with snakes. (There's an obvious SS/HG reference in there, but it really can be anything! As long as there are kittens. And snakes. I'd like for the kittens not to be fed to the snakes.)

56. Everyone says his hair is greasy. Why not come up with the way it got that way? Is it because of all the potions he brews? Is it because of an obsession with Crisco/something similar?