

Hide and Seek

by Sevvv

Could it be that the time has come at last for the snarky, cold-hearted Potions master to finally consider retirement?

One-shot

Chapter 1 of 1

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There it was again; the gentle, tap, tap, tapping of soft-footed feet descending. He was sure it wasn't his imagination or lack of sleep prevailing.

Following in the direction of the sound, the tall, dark wizard walked quickly and confidently towards his own quarters, billowing black cloak following obediently behind, like some subservient boneless, silky creature of the night.

This time he was determined to get to the bottom of it; seek out the culprit and administer a just punishment that would ensure he or she would never again venture within so much as a mile of the sacred space solely belonging to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry's formidable Potions master. They would live to regret this despicable act of insubordination for the rest of their miserable life, he could promise them that. If only he could catch them.

As it was, this was the third night in succession that he'd followed the sound. Both of the previous occasions had led him nowhere; he had found nothing. And yet, he felt sure, someone was up to no good. It couldn't be Peeves, the resident poltergeist, Severus guessed. If it was he would not be so discreet and secretive he got his kicks from being obvious and letting his 'victim' know how much he enjoyed their humiliation. No, it definitely wasn't Peeves. Nor was it likely to be a first- or second-year student out of bed, the professor further reasoned. They were habitually and predictably lacking in the skill, subtlety and imagination for such an act and would be too terrified of the well-publicised consequences to even contemplate such a dare.

Had it been a few years ago (actually 'a few' was being over generous Severus realised), he would have suspected Potter of course. Under that wretched Invisibility Cloak of his, just like his damn father before him! But both Potters were long gone from Hogwarts: The father, James, to his grave of course and the son, the famous Harry, saviour of the wizarding world, happily married with a family of his own now, after his triumphant defeat of the Dark Lord. Severus couldn't totally suppress the smirk that threatened to form on his thinning lips at that thought: The perfect fairy tale ending for The-Boy-Who-Lived. Meanwhile, he who had given his all in his role as double agent extraordinaire was back where he started: Teaching dunderhead students the fine art of potion making; a subject very few of them would ever even appreciate yet alone master. No doubt, in the next few years, he would be adding the new generation of Potter brats to his long list of futile attempts at creating geniuses such as he, perish the thought.

He hadn't even made it to Headmaster here at Hogwarts, despite holding the position temporarily under the guise of The Ministry's infiltration, just before the defeat of He-Who-Can-Now-Safely-Be-Named-If-You-Can-Be-Bothered. No, that 'honour' had gone to Minerva McGonagall, who continued to show absolutely no signs of wanting to relinquish her status. Not that he was bothered or bitter in any way of course, he hastily reminded himself. After all, he had been awarded The Order of Merlin, First Class for all his sacrifices and efforts during the war and for his role in ensuring the Dark Lord's downfall. Like that was in any way compensation! A nice, fat pre-retirement cheque would have gone down so much better to his way of thinking.

But he pulled himself up sharply and further chided his own thoughts away from being so self-pitying and maudlin. It never did any good to think along such lines. What was done was done. He had been given a part to play and, like all good actors, he had played it well and received the expected accolade when the final curtain came down on it all. And, just like the collective fickleness of any audience, his performance had now long been forgotten by the wizarding public in general and outlived their limited

memories.

Perhaps he was losing his touch though? It really wasn't like him to be so easily defeated, not to mention deceived. Whoever was daring to descend to the dungeons in the middle of the night and managing to remain so elusive was just digging their own grave, asking for trouble. He would catch them eventually, no matter how long it took. He always did.

The aging professor ran a calloused long-fingered hand through his greying, once raven-black, hair and audibly sighed. What was the matter with him, letting such things get to him in this way? Perhaps he should consider taking early retirement after all? Lead a nice, quiet life of self-indulgence and luxury. He'd heard that they'd just built some tempting sounding one-bedroom apartments in that new gated development in Hogsmeade. That could suit. Whist or Bridge three times a week with the other residents, long walks in the countryside with the local rambles association. Friends round for tea on Sundays. He didn't think so somehow. Not just yet any way.

Then again, maybe he'd be more at home in a sweet little thatched cottage by the sea; the rose-bedecked door frequently being left open enticingly to passers-by to encourage the tantalising smell of delicious freshly home-baked apple pie to waft out from in between the cosy oak beams inside? He was just being plain silly now.

He figured that one didn't have to be Sybill Trelawney to work out that he was probably destined to live out his days in the grey, musty, austere Scottish castle he called home peppered with sojourns to his ramshackle little terraced house in Spinner's End and the somewhat more luxurious place he owned in Tuscany of course. Even he had to have the occasional respite from the constant, on-going, act of playing the snarky, hard bastard. It got tedious.

He turned the corner sharply, hand automatically gripping his wand handle as an instinctive reflex action to seeing the slightly ajar door ahead of him.

A smile cracked uneasily across the hard planes of his features as he thought of his 'prey' on the other side of that same heavy, wooden door. And, delicately placing a black-booted foot up underneath it, he meticulously and deliberately slowly kicked it creakily open to reveal the dark, unlit room beyond.

'Lumos!' he shouted in a deep, resounding voice, and his wand-tip lit instantly, illuminating the sparsely furnished room with a sudden, ethereal golden glow. But it revealed no one. The seemingly empty classroom appeared to mock the Potion master's thunderous demeanour, and he stared around increasingly angrily; coal-dark eyes darting from side to side in animated frustration. But then they suddenly fell on a source of movement off to his left, high up, and revealed a pair of sharp, yellow-green, almond-shaped eyes, surrounded by scraggly, matted fur. Severus lowered his wand and began to tuck it back inside his cloak whilst giving the cat, precariously balanced on a high shelf, his iciest, meanest glare.

Damn that Mrs. Norris! Wasn't she dead yet? Heaven knew she should be; it was unnatural for an animal to live so long! He felt that he should blast her to eternity zap her once and for all and do everyone (apart from her equally old, moth-eaten and besotted owner - long-suffering school caretaker, Argus Filch) a favour.

But, instead, Severus found himself muttering, "Nox", and returning the room to darkness once more, whilst ensuring that the door was again left standing slightly open, and turning on his heels to return to his own rooms.

'I must be getting soft in my old age,' he grumbled aloud to himself. But, this time, the warming, gentle smile came almost naturally and tempered the craggy lines of his distinguished, if not-quite-handsome, face.

Maybe not such a hard, cold-hearted bastard after all! he thought, grinning. And, with no one around to either contradict his thoughts or, fortunately for him, witness the scene, Professor Severus Snape, Potions master and still sexy head of Slytherin house, did the only kind of retiring that he was prepared to do for many a long while yet and hastened all too happily to his room to catch up on some well deserved dreamless sleep in blissful solitude.