Crypts

by kizzy7

The first thing Severus recognised was the darkness... Written for shellsnapeluver's birthday.

One-shot

Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: I wrote this as a birthday present for the lovely shellsnapeluver. Happy Birthday, sweetie! As always, thanks to the admins at TPP.

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The first thing he recognised was the darkness...so dark that it smothered him, creeping stealthily into his eyes, his nose, his mouth. As if he had his eyes tightly shut, a dark, heavy cloth over his face, huddled in a cramped closet in a nameless cellar in the middle of an endless night.

Open your eyes, Snape, he urged himself. With a start, he realised that they were already open, and the blank blackness was his newfound reality.

Experimentally, he tried to move, shifting his legs and his hands. He brushed against hardness, closed in on all sides. Lifting his head, his forehead came into sharp contact with a smooth surface. The movement caused him to cry out in pain, a hideous throbbing convulsing his throat. He touched his neck.

Wet liquid beneath his fingertips, and two open wounds, stinging until tears prickled, threatening to fall.

"What in the bloody hell?" he asked aloud. Darkness and silence were his answer.

The snake, he thought. *That bloody fucking snake.*

He remembered then. The cold, cruel floor of the Shrieking Shack. Suspended mid-air with Nagini slithering around his body, sinking sharp teeth into his soft throat. Lily's green eyes in Potter's face.

Memories, sliding like strands of silver from his mind.

I am dead.

But that wasn't right.

I am dead, he repeated, hoping the words were true. *Lily?*

He shifted again, placing his hands flat against the surface in front of him. He was lying down, then. In some sort of... box.

A casket.

Because the venom could have paralyzed him, virtually stopped his heart and frozen his lungs.

Because those careless, asinine dunderheads could have mistaken him for dead.

Whispers of conversations returned to him, flooding his consciousness with mockery.

I'm sorry, Professor Snape. Thank you for loving my mum, and for everything, really. Bravest man I've ever known.

Potter, annoying until the very end.

Sir, I wish... I wish I could have done something. I should have saved you. Because you... you deserved better.

Granger, stupidly soppy until the very end. He remembered her crying over him, her face ugly and blotched with tears. He remembered she had leaned over his coffin, kissing him gently on the cheek.

A pat on his hand, flowers on his grave. A headstone with sentimental bullshit forever marking his eternal resting place.

They would have buried the dead quickly, desiring to move on with their lives, rebuild what was left.

He couldn't have survived much more than two, three days, unconscious.

And he didn't have much longer, judging by his weakness. Loss of blood and lack of food and water had left him close to death. But he was still breathing.

Blindly groping around him, he grasped a thin strand of hard wood. His wand. At least they had buried him with his wand.

He gripped it tightly, wondering if he had the strength necessary to blast himself from his own grave.

"*Confrigo!*" he shouted, only it wasn't a shout. It was hardly a whisper, a gravelly, choked whisper that seemingly drained him of what little energy he possessed. The feeble streak of light bounced onto the ceiling of his coffin, momentarily illuminating the small space. At the blinding sight of his robed legs and feet surrounded by hard, indifferent wooden planks, he shrieked hoarsely, panic completely coursing through his body.

The spell dented the coffin, cracking the surface. He ran his fingertips along the cracks, pushing against the tiny star of contact. He pushed until he saw white lights on the horizon of his consciousness, and he thought, *I'm going to **kill** them.*

Potter first. Fucking forget Lily's eyes. His debt was repaid, and if he survived, he was going to kill them, all of them. Granger next. Perhaps she would cry again as he strangled the life from her, his grip relentless around her chicken neck.

Just as a thin dusting of dirt ghosted into the coffin, settling like a sheen over his face, Severus fainted.

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She was lying on an unfamiliar surface...it felt hard and cold beneath her. Shifting, she strained her neck. A slab of stone, perhaps granite, and she was inexplicably drifting in a stream of red. She tried to move, willing her fingers into the liquid, but she couldn't. Experimentally, she attempted to lift her legs, to push herself into a sitting position, and again failed. It was as if she was tethered to the stone with strong, invisible ropes.

Hermione could feel the sea of red, flowing steadily around her; intuitively, she knew it was blood. She was drifting along a stream of blood, mysteriously bound to solid granite.

Like a mortuary slab.

She tried to speak, releasing a pitiful gurgle, and it was then that she saw him. Perched precariously at the end of the stone, dressed entirely in black. To her eyes, he looked like a great, flying creature of the night, clutching to the granite with sharp, menacing talons.

He opened his mouth, and it was a cavern, looming wide to swallow her whole.

"I am ready," she said, though no human sounds issued from her lips. "I want this."

He curled his black lips into a grin.

Flushed and frightened, Hermione awoke with a start, her skin prickling uncomfortably. Outside, the wind was eerily howling against the window. Something was outside, waiting for her by the window. She stilled in the night, listening.

Scratching. Scraping.

So quiet she had to strain to hear it.

"Ginny?" She shook her sleeping companion, but she snored loudly and turned over, deeply asleep.

"Lot of bloody help you are," she grumbled as she climbed out of bed.

The air in their bedroom was cool, especially after the warmth of quilt. She shivered, sliding her fingers across her shoulders, hugging herself for comfort.

Carefully in the dark, she made her way across the room to the window. During the night, it had opened and now fluttered erratically on its hinges. A skeletal tree branch scraped the glass; the full moon cast eerie shapes onto her carpeted floor.

With determination, she slammed the window closed, clasping the lock shut for good measure. Hermione gazed out the window...a storm was coming soon. She could feel it, a subtle sense of electricity in the air that made the hairs on the back of her neck raise.

Full moon, she thought. *Werewolves. Greyback*.

Irrationally spooked, she closed the blinds and returned to bed, drawing the blankets high up to her chin. She closed her eyes, willing sleep to come.

An inexplicable itch between her shoulder blades whispered to her that something in the dark was watching her.

She cuddled closer to her sleeping roommate, calmed by the sight of her red hair and the homey scent of the Weasley household. Ginny mumbled something incomprehensible and started snoring again.

Wan moonlight trickled through fogged glass, and Hermione couldn't sleep.

Something was wrong; she felt it to the depth of her very being. Like she had forgotten something important...missed a crucial detail in the horror of the past few days.

And her dreams. Whenever she was able to drift off to sleep...fighting against the memory of Hagrid carrying Harry out of the Forbidden Forest, cradling his lifeless body to his giant chest, or the day when they buried Tonks and Fred and Lupin and Colin and Snape...

Snape.

It was Snape.

Snape, in her dreams. But he was dead. She knew this...she had seen him die, she had witnessed his burial and the glassy sheen of his eyes as his coffin was lowered into the ground. She had tossed handfuls of dirt into his grave, tears shining and lips quivering unsteadily.

She tossed in bed, scrunching up her pillow beneath her, sighing in frustration.

"Oh my God!" She jolted from bed, throwing on a pair of jeans and her favorite loose t-shirt. After sliding into her trainers, she headed for the boys' room, quiet lest she wake the mourning Mrs. Weasley.

A strong surge of affection flowed through her at the sight of Harry's ruffled hair and Ron's sleeping, freckled face. They had survived. Against all odds, they had survived.

Gently, she shook Harry awake, whispering frantically. Sleepily, he reached for his glasses, yawning as he slipped them on.

"'Mione? What's up?"

"Harry," she replied. "I think... I think that Snape might still be alive."

"What?!" Ron pushed himself up into a sitting position. "You've gone bonkers, Hermione."

"No. No, I haven't. Listen, I know it sounds crazy, but if he was taking an antidote...if any amount at all was in his bloodstream...then Nagini's venom would have paralyzed him for at least twenty-four hours. Do you know what this means? We could have buried him alive! And he could still be alive!"

Harry scowled and burrowed himself deeper into the mound of blankets. "Go back to sleep, Hermione. I'm *done*. We're done with all that. Let Snape rest in peace."

"I have to check," she said determinedly, clutching her wand. "Come with me?"

Harry turned onto his side, away from her. "No. Just go back to sleep."

Ron nodded in agreement. "Yeah, 'Mione. We'll talk about this in the morning. Not around Mum, though. Bit touchy, you know. About the... dead."

Saddened by her friends' indifference, Hermione slipped from the room.

She would have to go alone.

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The storm arrived in a torrential downpour of rain, hurdling from the sky like angry tears.

Through the sheet of rain, Hermione gazed at the midnight moon. It seemed to glow red, spilling bloodlike light over the graveyard.

Through the headstones of the fallen, she steadily wove her way to Snape's resting place. She paused to trace the outline of the etched wording on his headstone.

Severus Snape.

Headmaster.

Hero.

Friend.

She snorted in the dark. She doubted he would approve of his epitaph. Her stomach clenched tightly as she crazily thought, *Maybe I'll be able to ask him.*

The rain soaked her clothes, plastering her simple t-shirt to her skin. Her hair clung in uncomfortable clumps around her face. Water ran down in streams, along the curve of her nose, the arch of her cheekbones, blurring her vision.

The earth beneath her shifted, and she stumbled to the ground with a cry.

At first, she thought that the dark and the storm and the moonlight were playing tricks on her, but she felt the blast of earth, muddy with rainwater, smatter against her body, too real to be a hallucination. Frantically, she wiped the mud from her eyes.

A shape rose from the ground, dirty and dark, silvery streaks of blood smeared across his neck.

"Professor!" she shouted just as lightening streaked brilliantly across the sky.

A booming clap of thunder followed. The figure turned towards her, and the visceral hatred in his black eyes left her breathless with fear.

"You," he growled, raising a finger accusingly at her. "Run, Granger. You better run, little girl, because I am going to fucking *kill* you."

Another flash of lightening illuminated his crooked nose, his bloody robes.

Hermione screamed.

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