

Fall

by kizzy7

High above the castle grounds, Severus contemplates life.

One-shot

Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N I wrote this for lulabelle72 and elise_wanderer's birthdays! Their prompts were 'falling leaves,' 'castle gargoyles,' and 'the fleeting passage of time.'

No one has ever seen this, seen the castle the way I have he thinks, drawing his cloak tight across his chest.

Flanked by two identical gargoyles—horned beasts, the both of them, claws scraping at the edge of the narrow precipice, wings spread as if about to leap from the edge, sinewy, stoned muscles and curved, granite veins tense and pulsing for flight—Severus rests his head against an outstretched shoulder.

"You and me," he says to them both. "We get to see this."

Wordlessly, their toothy mouths gape in fierce grimaces of eternal anger. But sometimes, Severus imagines that they understand him. Sometimes, their eyes move. Follow him in his morose contemplations of life and death.

High above the grounds, these gargoyles protect against wayward owls and birds and even the occasional Thestral, and Severus finds himself coming here—sliding open the latch of a window and springing into laboured flight—more and more.

Especially now, during fall, when the leaves of the trees change colours and burn with reddish-orange light in the dusky amber of early evening. One by one, they will fall, he knows, plucked from their stems by the powerful force of nature, gliding to the ground to be crushed beneath hurried footsteps and careless hooves.

He imagines standing on the ledge of this narrow precipice, edging his boots forward inch by inch, spreading his arms and closing his eyes. Leaping. He can see it so bright in his mind; he can feel the wind against his face, whipping his hair, his robes.

He imagines falling like those leaves to the ground.

"Severus," says a voice, floating up from somewhere below him. "Severus."

Brown hair threaded with generous whips of grey, calling to him from the window of the Astronomy Tower. He hears a whispered spell, and now here she is, drifting up to his ledge. Her robes flutter in the breeze.

Lightly, she lands next to him, clutching the gnarled wing of the gargoyle to his right for purchase.

"Whew," she breathes, "damn Self-Levitation charms. Pity we can't all fly, Severus." She cocks her head, a lopsided smile curving her wind-reddened lips.

"Pity," he agrees.

Still grasping the gargoyle—who looks, Severus swears, *annoyed*—she steadies her wobbling feet before lowering herself next to him. "There's a running pool in the staff room, you know, betting on where you disappear off to. Coffin's winning, currently." She dangles her feet off the ledge, the knuckles of her hands white with nervous pressure.

She never did like heights.

"What do you want, Hermione?" he asks as wind blows gustily through the space behind them. A small squeak of terror, and she clutches his wrist.

"I just wanted to see how you were. In my thirty years of being Headmistress, I've never seen you smile, Severus. And lately, you're always... gone. Up here, I guess."

Gone, he thinks, looking once again at the grounds—an ancient Hagrid lumbers towards the Forbidden Forest, flags ripple with flashes of colour in the distant Quidditch pitch. And the leaves swirl in the breeze.

Gone, he thinks again, like his youth. Old age has settled upon him with an unanticipated weariness.

Menacing tendrils of a headache claw against his forehead. "Hermione, I..." He can't finish his thought. Fervently, he wishes for his voice back—his voice, his ~~voice~~ voice, those luscious, deep timbres of rumbling seduction, the silky threads of insinuation woven within the simplest of phrases.

She used to love his voice.

Her thumb is still on his wrist, stroking light patterns against his skin. "Come on, Severus. Let's go back inside."

A leaf flutters into her hair. Scarlet, edged with burnished gold, curls against her cheek. He reaches for her to feel the contrast—the textured autumn leaf against her soft, pale skin. She leans into his touch.

"Come on, Severus," she whispers. "Let's go in."

"Hermione," he says, "I smiled on our wedding day."

"I know," she responds. Tears shine in her eyes.

He folds her warm within his arms. "I'll fly us down. And then we're off to bed, Miss Granger, where I can fuck you good and proper."

A muffled laugh against his robes. "Okay," she says. "Just don't let me fall."

They float like leaves to their room, kissing with the manic urgency of their younger years. High above the Astronomy Tower, two pairs of glossy stone eyes gleam, gleam almost as if alive.
