

Halloween Rite

by Pennfana

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: My parents almost named me Johanna, but that still isn't even close to making me J.K. Rowling. ;)

His eyes are closed, his breathing even. But Severus Snape is awake; he savours his early waking and the warmth and comfort of his bed. Today is the day. Even if he hadn't had the use of a calendar, he'd know that it was time. After all these years, he could feel it in his bones; once, during a somewhat uncharacteristic flight of fancy, he imagined that even after he was dead, his body—regardless of its state of decomposition—would rise from the grave for a single day just to perform the same ritual he had done on this day for more years than he cared to count.

He sighs and slowly opens his eyes. He knows that to delay this any longer is to quite possibly risk missing the chance to do the ritual entirely, and that would never do...

Rising from his bed, he pads into the bathroom. It's not as luxurious as one might expect the Head of such an elitist House to have, but his needs are simple. However, he allows himself the self-indulgence of a moment with his hands on either side of the sink, head bowed. Then he straightens and, looking at his reflection in the silent mirror (he'd hexed the voice out of it years ago), he speaks the same traditional words that he's spoken at this very moment for most of his life:

"All right, Severus my lad, you can do this."

With a wave of his hand, the bathtub fills with warm and pleasantly-scented water. Slipping out of his threadbare grey nightshirt, Snape steps into the bath and sinks into the comfortable water with a sigh of relief. There is a moment of panic in which he worries that he forgot to place the necessary tools on the bathtub's edge the night before, but after a short and frantic search, he finds them hidden behind the shower curtain. He smirks, then dunks his head under the water. As much as he hates to get his hair wet, it would hardly be useful to do this with dry hair...

He surfaces and, as is his yearly habit, grabs the bottle of shampoo that he carefully made the week before. He massages the goo into his hair until it's nice and frothy, and then he grabs the other item on his bathtub's edge; this part is vital. It's the only way he knows to keep the shampoo in just long enough that it removes what it has to without removing all of his hair along with it. With another smirk, possibly at the thought of what the rest of the Hogwarts staff would say if they knew what he was doing this morning, he takes a deep breath, squeezes the rubber duck to make sure it makes the right squeaking sound for punctuation, and starts to sing in a smooth tenor voice...

Rubber Duckie, you're the one,

You make bathtime lots of fun!

Rubber Duckie, I'm awfully fond of you!

Doo doo doo, dee doo

Rubber Duckie, joy of joys,

When I squeeze you, you make noise!

Rubber Duckie, you're my very best friend it's true!

Every day when I make my way to the tubby,

I find a little fellow who's cute and yellow and chubby,

Rub a dub dubby,

Rubber Duckie, you're so fine, and I'm lucky that you're mine!

Rubber Duckie, I'm awfully fond of you!

Every day when I make my way to the tubby,

I find a little fellow who's cute and yellow and chubby,

Rub a dub dubby,

Rubber Duckie, you're so fine, and I'm lucky that you're mine!

Rubber Duckie, I'm awfully fond of—

Rubber Duckie I'd like a whole pond of—

Rubber Duckie I'm awfully fond of you!

By now, there's actually an all-out smile on Snape's face—a terrifying sight. Giving the duck another squeaky squeeze, he slips under the water again to rinse out the shampoo. This is the moment of truth, the moment when he finds out whether he's correctly calculated the dosage of various ingredients in the shampoo. Too much, and he'll be bald for a few weeks. Too little, and he'll have extra work to do next year...

He surfaces again and reaches up a tentative hand to see if he still has any hair. Success! *Severus my lad, you're a bloody genius!*

He relaxes in the water for a few more minutes, knowing that if he stays in for much longer, he'll be late for breakfast. After one last cheerful squeak of the duck, he reluctantly climbs out of the tub. Although he is fastidious enough to require a bath at least six times a week, there's only one day a year in which he will lower his head into the water. Walking back into his bedroom, he casts a drying charm on himself and selects a set of robes that are perhaps slightly better tailored than what he usually wears—today is a special day, after all—and makes his way up to the Great Hall. And although he would likely deny it should anyone happen to catch him at it, he is humming a cheerful tune. Several Gryffindor and Hufflepuff students catch a hint of it in the background and, trembling, wonder what special torture he has in mind for them today. Noticing this, he starts to smirk, which scares them even more.

He muses that perhaps he should wash his hair more often if his resulting good mood has consequences like this. But then, that would destroy the significance of the ritual, would it not? No, far better to give the students something to truly dread at Hallowe'en. After all, it is a day when people actually *want* to be scared...and there's nothing more truly terrifying to a Hogwarts student than the sight of a smiling Severus Snape.

Author's Note: Just a little silliness that would *not* get out of my head after I read debjunk's third prompt in this week's "Saturday Night Drabbles" thread: "It's Halloween, and Severus does his yearly ritual. (I'm specifically thinking visiting Lily's grave, but you can make this into any ritual you'd like.)" Well, the way my mind works is a strange thing sometimes, and the first thing that came to mind wasn't visiting Lily's grave, it was the question of why his hair is always greasy. The inclusion of the "Rubber Duckie" song just sort of happened...

Incidentally, if I recall Snape's date of birth correctly, he would have been about ten years old when the Rubber Duckie song made its first appearance. I don't know how well-known the song is or was in the UK, but the thought of Snape singing the song, complete with rubber duck squeaks, was just too funny to me to refuse to write. :)

I hope you enjoyed this latest product of my twisted little mind. And...er, debjunk, if you happen to read this, I hope I didn't misuse your prompt *too* badly. :)