

The One Thing I Can't Have

by *astopperindeath*

Birthdays are a time to reflect on happy memories. For Snape, birthdays are a reminder of the woman he lost. A series of birthday vignettes featuring Severus Snape and a well-meaning Remus Lupin.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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January 9th, 1982

Snape sat in the Thrashing Thestrel, a dilapidated, run-down bar in a corner of Knockturn Alley that only the worst of the worst visited. He didn't want to run into anyone from his new life. Snape had only just left Azkaban after Karkaroff's testimony, and Snape's sobbing confession of the prophecy to Dumbledore and his subsequent Vow was still entirely too fresh to discuss. All he wanted to do was sit, drink, and maybe fuck a whore before this night was out.

"Happy fucking twenty-second birthday to me," Snape grumbled.

His birthdays hadn't been worth remembering since his fifth year-calling Lily a Mudblood was the worst thing he had ever done and had started his worst periods of unhappiness at Hogwarts. Even in light of all the atrocities he'd had to commit for the Dark Lord, that day on the castle grounds was still by far the worst day of his life. Losing Lily's friendship had cost him the one happy part of his years at Hogwarts.

As children, they always had celebrated their birthdays together. On his birthdays, they would go to the nearby playground and sit on the swings, talking for hours about what they wanted to pursue "when they grew up." As they had matured, their discussions moved from the playground to the Quidditch stands-his birthday was usually so cold that no one ventured out there if they didn't have practice. There they had talked about everything. Snape grimaced at this thought. *Well, she talked about everything; I just listened mostly.* As the years had progressed, he had to listen to her talk about men that were not him, but he had honestly been okay with that. He loved Lily, but ultimately he just wanted her to be happy. He'd thought that if he just continued to listen, then she would eventually choose him. The day of the Mudblood Incident had changed that forever.

His birthday of 1976 had been the last they celebrated together. And, ever since graduation, he had come to this same bar, sat on this same stool, and drunk until he couldn't remember her face.

Except this year it was infinitely more painful.

Lily's death was still too vivid in his mind. By the time he had realized that Voldemort had no plans to spare her, it had been too late to do anything. He had arrived at Godric's Hollow only a few minutes after the Dark Lord had vanished. Harry had been screaming and the house still smoking. He had paused long enough to ensure the boy would continue to live and had rushed to Lily's side.

She hadn't died of the Killing Curse in the same way as all of the others he had seen. The Killing Curse usually left an aura of darkness about the body, and the face of the deceased was usually contorted in fear. But not Lily. She'd appeared even more beautiful in death than she had in life-her skin had almost glowed that night. He had blamed it on the full moon overhead, but he should have known then that something special had happened that night. If he had taken a moment to look at his Mark, he would have known something had changed. It had only been hours later that he realized that something special had indeed happened at Potter's house that night.

Sobbing uncontrollably, he had held her body to his, keening back and forth. It had been the first time he had held her in years, and the knowledge that it was only in death that he could be this close to her again had nearly destroyed him. The sudden roar of Black's motorcycle had been the only thing that made him leave her side-he knew if he was found at the scene of this slaughter that no one would allow him to live. His loyalty to the Order had still been too new, and as far as he had known, only Dumbledore had truly believed his allegiance fell with them. He'd Apparated back to Spinner's End long enough to burn his death-soaked clothing and to make himself as presentable as he could before Apparating to the gates of Hogwarts. The vow he had taken that night had already changed his life in ways he'd never imagined.

With all these thoughts swirling in his head, he consumed drink after drink. That whore was looking like less and less of a possibility, but he didn't mind that much. With the amount of alcohol he was drinking, he would be lucky if he had enough money for his tab, let alone a Knockturn Alley trollop. Senses dulled, he didn't even notice when Lupin walked into the bar.

Lupin's nostrils flared as he entered the bar. The smells were atrocious...the odors of sweat, come, and vomit assaulted his sensitive nose. After the first wave of the miasma, he noticed the more subtle undertones...firewhisky, wine, and... Snape.

Now that's interesting. Snape had taken an unspoken vow of loneliness since his return to the side of Light. Not that he blamed Snape...Moody for one hadn't given Snape a moment's peace at any of the Order meetings, and he had a feeling Snape knew that he was followed wherever he went. Lupin sniffed deeply. *Yup, Mundungus is here too.*

Taking a deep breath, Lupin walked up to Snape's stool and took a seat next to him. Judging from Snape's posture, he was well into his cups by now. Knowing that startling the man wasn't the best idea, he motioned to the barkeep for a drink and waited for Snape to notice him.

It didn't take long.

"Here to spy on me too, Lupin?"

Lupin sighed...apparently Snape was fully aware he was being followed. "No, Snape, that's Mundungus' job tonight."

"What. Do. You. Want?" Snape growled.

"A drink," Lupin replied. "What *do you* want, Snape?"

"The one thing I can't have." And with a half-choked sob, Snape threw his galleons down onto the counter and stormed out of the bar.

"He doesn't seem to be having a good birthday, does he?" the barkeep remarked as he placed a greasy pint of ale in front of Lupin.

"Fuck." Lupin turned and hurried out of the bar, hoping to stop Snape. But as Snape was wont to do, he had disappeared into thin air.

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January 9th, 1983.

His birthday was just as cold as ever. Knowing that the last thing he needed tomorrow was a hangover for his first period Double Potions with Slytherin and Gryffindor, he decided to spend his birthday at Hogwarts. He snuck down to the kitchens...something he didn't have to do as a professor, but something that did remind him of some of the fun nights as a student...and obtained a thermos of hot cocoa before trudging out to the Quidditch stands. He knew he could always reheat it magically later, but there was something oddly comforting about cradling a warm thermos between cold hands. *Must be the Muggle coming out in me* Moving to the Gryffindor section, he lay down upon a bench and got lost in his thoughts.

He remembered Lily's face and the silly rainbow of freckles across her nose. He remembered her hair and how it would whip about her face because she never remembered to secure it before coming to the stands. He smiled as he remembered how many leather thongs he had conjured for her over their years at Hogwarts. And he remembered her eyes...her emerald-green eyes. He remembered how they had sparkled when she was happy, how they had burned when she was angry, and how they had changed to the color of the sea when she cried.

The last time she had looked him in the eyes, her eyes were the color of the sea.

He sat up and poured himself another mug of cocoa. Cradling the mug between his fingers, he looked across the pitch and saw a man in tattered, mismatched robes walking towards him. Scowling, he wished that the Apparation wards didn't keep him from being able to vanish back to the privacy of his rooms.

Lupin reached the stands and began to climb up towards him.

"What do you want, Wolfman?"

Lupin dug into the pockets of his robes and procured a flask. "Happy Birthday, Snape."

Snape stared at him, attempting to keep his face from falling into an expression of shock.

"How did you know it was my birthday?"

"Barkeep from the Thrashing Thestrel told me last year. Thought I'd make it up to you by bringing you the drinks my presence cheated you out of."

Snape eyed Lupin suspiciously.

"Oh calm down, Snape. Even I know better than to try to poison a Potions master."

Still wary, Snape took the flask and added a healthy dollop to his cocoa. Conjuring a second mug, he poured some of the contents of his thermos into it and shoved it at Lupin.

They sat there, side-by-side, sipping their cocoa and staring at the wind-swept flags circling the pitch. Snape could tell the silence was killing Lupin, but he wanted to see how long it would take the werewolf to crack.

Twenty-seven minutes.

"Why are you out here?"

Snape had figured this would be his question. And in twenty-seven minutes, he had not been able to come up with a decent lie.

"This was where I spent all of my birthdays at Hogwarts." And with that kernel of truth, Snape adjusted his muffler closer around his neck and poured more liquor into his mug, staring at the contents to keep from having to look at Lupin.

"With Lily," Lupin added.

Snape's head whipped up, his eyes boring into Lupin's. "And how do you know that, Lupin?"

"You can quit the Legilimancy right now, Snape. I'm not going to lie to you."

Snape cast his eyes downward, knowing he'd been caught.

Lupin continued, "Lily half-told me once. It was the night before her wedding. After depositing James into their bed, I came downstairs and asked her how she was because for some reason she was looking sad the night before her own wedding. After a few moments, she told me that she was depressed because her best childhood friend couldn't be at her wedding. It was last year, when checking up on Harry, that Petunia asked after you. I asked how she even knew you, and she told me about your relationship with Lily. Didn't take much for me to put two and two together, Snape."

Snape's mouth quivered infinitesimally. His left eye began to twitch as he quickly tried to bury his feelings. Some man he was, coming undone the first time someone mentioned his long-lost friend to him since her death. He really needed to work on his emotions. He hadn't known she ever thought of him after that stupid day during fifth year. Somehow it made his life a little bit worse.

"She mentioned you a few times over the years. Never by name-I think she thought James would be mad if she spoke of you. But she spoke happily of childhood birthdays, spent both here and at a playground, with her best friend. I guess that was with you, huh?"

Snape nodded sharply, eyes growing steely.

"So is that why you've come, then, Lupin? Come to gloat at Snivellus for missing the one friend he'd ever had, that he himself was responsible for losing? Knowing that this is the only way left that you could get to me? Can't lord friendships over me because all of yours are dead or in jail. Can't best me in a job because honestly, who would ever hire you. Can't parade a girlfriend in front of me because you can't keep one for more than three weeks before a certain, furry proclivity ruins everything. But you can gloat at this-that old Snivellus is missing his long, lost love. The one whose death he couldn't even stop."

And sporting his consummate sneer, Snape snatched up the thermos and the mugs and stalked back towards the castle.

Lupin hung his head. *No. I just needed a friend, too...*

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January 9th, 1984

A blizzard in Scotland had kept the students from being able to return to Hogwarts. With so many students born to non-magical families, transit other than by the Hogwarts Express was unavailable to many. To ensure that none of the students would fall behind, Dumbledore had extended Winter Break by two weeks. Snape found himself alone on his birthday at his house in Spinner's End for this first time in years, sitting on the floor of his living room, his back resting against the sofa. He hadn't moved in hours and had spent his day searching for answers in the flickering of his fire.

He started when someone banged on his back door. No one knew he lived here. It was too many days past Christmas for carolers, and he'd scared away every door-to-door salesman in the county years ago. *Who in the flying fuck can that possibly be?*

Assuming it was Dumbledore playing some sort of horrible trick on him, he wrenched open the door, expecting to find a bag of lemon drops or other such nonsense on his stoop.

He did not expect to find Remus Lupin.

"What the *fuck* do you want, mongrel?"

Lupin stared back at him and merely handed him a picture frame. In the frame was a Muggle photograph of a young girl, no more than seven years old. Her red hair was pulled up into ponytails, and she was dressed as a princess. Several paces away from her was a scrawny, dark-haired boy; he was the same age as the girl and was dressed in oversized, ill-kempt clothes. He looked at the young girl as if she was his entire world.

"Who gave this picture to you?" Snape snarled.

Finding his voice, Lupin answered, "Petunia. I told her Dumbledore was looking for pictures of faculty for a yearbook. Good thing she doesn't know Hogwarts doesn't have a yearbook, eh?"

Snape was angry. And touched. And angry that he was touched. "Why would you even bring this to me?"

"Because it's your birthday, Severus." Snape twitched at the use of his first name. In all the years they had known each other, Lupin had never once called him by his first name. "And because, well, I miss her too. And I know that sometimes, pictures help."

And before Snape could reply, Lupin turned and walked a few steps down the alley before Disapparating.

Snape returned to his living room, suddenly very cold in spite of the warm fire. Summoning a blanket, he curled up in front of the fire, pressed the frame into his chest, and stifled the sobs that threatened to wrack his entire body. He eventually fell asleep, fitfully tossing and turning for the rest of the night.

The framed photograph remained hidden in his sock drawer for many years to come.

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January 9th, 1985

Snape couldn't believe he was doing this. He really needed to get over this obsession or at the very least find some new friends-friends without skulls on their arms. He had requested the day off from teaching for "personal reasons." It was his first day missing school since taking the job, and Dumbledore had complied almost instantaneously. Leaving his house in Spinner's End with a sack full of candies, cakes, and half-pints of milk, he began walking down the street towards the old playground. Snow was falling softly and the layer from last night crunched under his boots.

As he rounded the corner, the battered playground came into sight. And there, sitting in the swing he still thought of as "Lily's swing," was Lupin.

He approached Lupin, trying desperately to sneer. "You know, if you keep showing up like this, Remus, people are going to start talking about us."

"Wouldn't people just love that? Us going gay for each other after all these years."

Falling into what felt like almost familiar banter at his point, Snape asked, "What are you doing here, Wolf?"

"Freezing my bollocks off," Lupin said, grinning. "What have you got in the sack?"

Snape flushed. It was one thing to bring his and Lily's banquet to an abandoned playground in the dead of winter. It was quite another to share it with Lupin.

"I'll show you mine if you show me yours!" Lupin said, with all the glee of a five-year-old. And before Snape could respond tersely that Lupin's comment did not help them sound any less homosexual, Lupin poured his treats out into the snow.

They very nearly mimicked what Snape himself had brought.

"How... how did you know, Remus?"

"A few well-placed questions to Dumbledore, Poppy, and your old Head of House. And a good memory for what you used to nick from other people on the train each year."

"Why are you being kind to me?"

Lupin sighed. Of course the emotionally repressed git would need it spelled out for him. "In the past five years, all of my best friends have either been killed or locked up in Azkaban forever. You're one of the few people left who remembers all of us together, even if you don't remember us fondly. And you've lost people, too. You were right all those years ago. I can't hold a job or a woman to save my life, and Gods know *you're* not getting any handsomer. We haven't got anyone but ourselves, Severus. I thought we could, you know, be friends... I know it probably won't last and that you'll still refer to me incessantly as 'that Wolf.' And I know that at least publicly you'll still be an arse, but I thought it might be nice to not be so damned lonely all the time."

Sighing and knowing he was resigning himself to a lot of emotional baggage he probably wasn't ready to handle yet, Snape dug into his sack, extracted a carton of milk, and handed it to Lupin.

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January 9th, 1986

Snape wasn't able to leave the castle this year. The dunderheads had caused far too many accidents today, as if they *knew* it was the one day a year he cared if he had a good day. Not that he usually did have a good day. He was so exhausted by the end of the day that he immediately went to his rooms and flopped down on his couch. After a short nap, he arose, stripped off his work clothes as he walked to his bedroom, donned a pair of comfortable flannel pajama bottoms, and wandered back out into his living room. He heard a hesitant knock on his chamber doors. Knowing that the only person who would bother him on his birthday was Lupin, he didn't even bother to don a shirt.

"And you were worried that people would think we were gay for playing on some swings, Snape," Remus said, quirked an eyebrow at Snape's bare chest.

"What do you want?"

"Budge up, Severus. I'm coming in."

Snape stepped aside and allowed Lupin entrance. The only other people who had been in his rooms since he'd taken the position at Hogwarts were Dumbledore and Minerva, and neither of them ever came for social calls. While Snape kept his labs immaculate, his rooms tended to suffer the opposite fate—books, parchment and quills were strewn across every surface and on half the floor. Robes and boots were strewn haphazardly over chairs and under tables. Lupin chortled as he surveyed the room. Snape gave him a look that did *not* invite comment.

Lupin sat on the couch, placing his briefcase next to him on the floor. "Bring me some glasses, please."

Snape entered his kitchen and returned a few minutes later with two juice glasses. He then sat on the other end of the couch. Lupin pulled a bottle of scotch from his bag and poured several fingers' worth into each glass.

"Talk, Severus."

"I don't 'talk,' Lupin."

"Well, you better start because I've gone through every memory of Lily a hundred times already and I need to have something else about her to think about."

No one had ever asked Snape about his relationship with Lily. And while he thought about her daily, he never got *to* talk about her. The words poured forth as abundantly as Lupin's scotch, and before long they were laughing and crying. Snape told Lupin about the time that they had put a potion his mother had taught him to brew in Petunia's shampoo so her hair would turn purple. He told Lupin about the times he hurt Lily's feelings and how each time he begged her forgiveness while holding a bouquet of tiger lilies, no matter the season (and how sometimes that bouquet cost him his pocket money for an entire month). And he told Lupin of the moment he had fallen in love with Lily and the subsequent moment he realized it never would have worked.

He even talked about the Mudblood Incident, an event he had *never* spoken about. And through all his pain and joy, Lupin just listened. Usually, Snape was the one who listened to others; it was strange and oddly cathartic to be the one talking for once.

They talked long into the night. Most of the bottle of scotch was gone, and Snape knew he'd regret it in a few hours when he had to teach, but for right now, he wasn't complaining.

Lupin collected up his things and rose from the couch. Snape walked him to the door of his chambers. Before reaching the door, Lupin turned, running a hand through his graying hair. And, without warning, he pulled Snape into a clumsy hug.

Snape stiffened in Lupin's arms. It was the first hug he had received... well, probably since fifth year. The caresses of whores didn't count as hugs—nothing one paid for counted as a hug.

But Lupin, a *man*, was hugging him, simply because he knew Snape needed it.

Snape buried his head into Lupin's shoulder and clung to Lupin's spare frame. Lupin caressed Snape's back in small circles, shushing Snape's silent pain. Lupin held Snape for a long time and gave him the hug he had needed for years. And Snape, for once, didn't run away.

Lupin finally released him and turned towards the door.

"Thank you, Remus," Snape whispered as he closed his door.

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Their friendship, of course, did not last. Snape and Lupin barely saw each other as it was, and after a time, Snape did not feel the need to haunt the old birthday sites that he had once shared with Lily. By the time of the second rise of the Dark Lord, Snape had retreated so far into himself that even Lupin couldn't reach him. The spying just became too much, and Snape could barely handle himself, let alone a friendship. The worst of it came the year Lupin held Snape's long wished-for DADA position. Seeing Lupin every day reminded him of the friend he had lost.

Everyone thought he had gotten Lupin fired because of their childhood enmity, but honestly, it had more to do with their short friendship. Snape knew of the curse on the DADA seat, and he knew the only way to negate the curse was either to be fired or to leave disgracefully. If one of these two conditions was not met, even if a DADA professor intended to leave at the end of term of his own free will, the classroom itself would lock the professor in and slowly suck out the oxygen in the room, asphyxiating its victim. And there wasn't a damned thing the Headmaster or anyone else could do about it. Not wishing to see his friend die, he had ensured the route of public

humiliation. Sure, it was a low thing to do to a person he had, at least at one time, considered to be a friend. But he couldn't just let Lupin die.

~**~

Snape still brews Lupin's Wolfsbane, even though he knows Lupin is still deeply hurt by his past actions. He hopes Lupin realizes that he wouldn't be bothered to brew such a complicated, time-consuming potion for someone he didn't give one whit about. Maybe one day, if this damned war ever ends, he can start being friends with him again. But until the spying and the lying is no longer a part of his life, he cannot let another person in.

The photograph of Lily is still in Snape's sock drawer. And next to it, there is a second picture. On the left is a man in his thirties, with shaggy, light brown, yet graying hair, wearing tattered robes. He sits at the kitchen table at Grimmauld Place, laughing and conversing with the holder of the camera. And behind him, lurking in the shadows is a man in ink-black robes, one eyebrow raised in amusement.

His two friends keep him sane during the worst times of this war, and neither of them have any clue.

AN: This was originally written for the LJ [severus_shorts](#) community; the category was Snape's birthdays 21-30 years old. Thanks to my beta reader, [tonksinger](#), and my alpha reader, [karelia](#), for their help and support! This was written months ago, and there are a few things I would do differently now. I may eventually rewrite this a bit, but for right now, this is what posted.