

A Handful of Stars

by Agnus Castus

Severus attends a Halloween party at Lily's house. Co-written with Rosewood for the Halloween Challenge on the FB Muffliato! group.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Authors' note:

The first half of the drabble is by Agnus Castus, and the story was completed by [Rosewood](#).

Severus walked carefully along the road which led to Lily's house, carrying a small lantern carved from a turnip.

He was pleased that Halloween was at the weekend; his father always spent Saturday afternoons at the pub, so it meant Severus could be alone with his mum. She was a different person when Dad wasn't around, and it was the only opportunity for Severus to talk to her about the wizarding world. He liked to read Mum's old textbooks in his bedroom, but it was more fun watching her perform spells. Transfiguration was his favourite – he enjoyed watching objects change unexpectedly – but he also liked learning about curses, hexes and jinxes. He wished he had his own wand so he could cast them on the horrible children at Muggle primary school. At least when he started Hogwarts next year, he would finally belong; he couldn't wait for his letter to arrive in January.

Mum had bought his turnip and helped to make the lantern. The round vegetable was a striking shade of purple, ripened almost all of the way to its white root, and it was a good size. Severus swelled with pride when his mother carved his pattern magically and made the special design flawless. She even placed an Everlasting Candle inside the lantern, so her son could enjoy the fruits of their labour for the whole of the afternoon.

"Remember, Severus," she said as she handed him a matchstick, "only the person who lights this candle can be the one to blow it out."

Severus nodded importantly as he struck the match, and the flame crackled into life.

When he turned the corner to Lily's estate, the candle continued to burn brightly, unaffected by chilly gusts of autumnal wind. He hadn't been to this part of town before, and he was surprised by the houses' huge front gardens and the number of trees lining the road. Crisp orange and brown leaves crunched underfoot, and Severus stepped on an occasional acorn or conker shell. These were the sorts of trees he associated with the playground in the park, not places where people actually lived.

Then he saw her house, a black silhouette against the moonless sky above. Electric lights were on in every room and laughter rang out from an open window. Severus faltered at the top of the driveway, suddenly feeling uncertain and nervous; he'd never met Mr and Mrs Evans, or any of Lily's friends. He became painfully aware of his gawky clothes, and he noticed his turnip was tiny compared to the impressive pumpkin lanterns standing sentinel by her porch.

Lily appeared at the front door, giggling and waving, dark red hair tumbling over her shoulders.

"Severus!" she shouted towards him. "Mum! Dad! Severus is here!"

Mrs Evans was the first to appear, wearing an apron over her party clothes. Severus walked slowly towards the door and rubbed his feet habitually on the doormat. He offered Lily his turnip.

"Oh! What a lovely lantern," Mrs. Evans said kindly. "It's very nice to meet you, Severus."

He didn't know what to say, so he simply replied, "Hello."

Lily grabbed Severus by the hand and dragged him indoors.

The sitting room was occupied by several older children who were busy chattering and laughing amongst one another.

"These are Petunia's friends," Lily said. "She has made it fairly clear that we are not to bother them."

Severus remained silent at this revelation. After the falling branch incident at the park, he had learned not to insult Petunia if he did not want to earn his friend's wrath.

"Yes, well it will probably be more fun if we hang around with your friends anyway," he replied.

"Um, Severus, you're my only guest," she said quietly. Her face flushed brightly as she averted her eyes. "Most of the other children are rather wary towards me because of my little bursts of accidental magic."

Severus gently squeezed her hand.

"You don't have to explain, I understand."

She smiled at him and led him to the dining room where the table was laden with sandwiches, toffee apples and other sweets. She proudly placed his lantern beside the plastic ghost centrepiece.

"Perfect!"

They each prepared a plate and retreated to the rear garden. Twilight descended as they talked, and Severus began pointing out the various constellations.

"There's Orion," Severus said. "The star on his right shoulder is known as Betelgeuse and the left one is Bellatrix."

"How did you learn so much about astronomy?" Lily asked.

"It was one of my mother's favourite subjects at Hogwarts," he replied. "Don't worry, you'll learn it soon enough. It's a required study."

"I can hardly wait, Sev," she said with a small sigh.

"Perhaps you won't have to wait that long," he replied thoughtfully. "Do you happen to have any marbles?"

They went to her bedroom, and she pulled out a small box containing dozens of glass marbles. After separating them by colour, Severus took a few of the blue ones, set them into a pattern of a constellation upon the floor and murmured an incantation beneath his breath. Lily watched, spellbound, as the handful of stars rose into the air and attached to the ceiling.

"How did you do that without a wand?"

"My mother taught me," he replied. "Wandless magic takes an extraordinary amount of concentration."

Severus continued the process repeatedly using a different colour for each constellation. He waved his hand toward the light to darken the room, and the ceiling sparkled with a glowing miniature version of the night sky.

"It's beautiful," Lily whispered.

"I'm glad you like it," he said, enjoying her reaction.

"I love it," she replied, wrapping her arms around his shoulders. "Thank you, it's a lovely gift!"

Severus began to blush, surprised by her embrace.

"You're quite welcome," he said. "Um, I better get going."

They entered the dining room, and Severus leaned over the table to blow out the Everlasting Candle in his lantern.

"Thank you for inviting me to your party," he said. "This has been the best Halloween, ever."

As he made his way home, Severus gazed up at the starry sky and smiled.