

The Witching Hour

by star_girl

Severus Snape visits the Potters' grave at Halloween. Co-written with Snapeswidow for the Halloween Challenge on the FB Muffliato! group.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Green flashes of light and a blood-curdling scream.

Evil laughter and red glowing eyes.

Carnage, death and destruction.

Broken bodies, broken dreams and a broken family.

A nightmare comes to life. A horror movie in the making.

A horrible reality. A horrible mistake.

A lifetime of guilt and regret.

Severus was pulled from his morbid thoughts as the bells of the little church in the village of Godric's Hollow chimed out the time. It was now way past eleven o'clock on Halloween night.

Severus Snape had always hated Halloween, even as a child. Being raised Muggle and poor, there was never enough money to afford a decent costume, and his mother, Eileen, was usually too tired from working two jobs to make one for him. His father, Tobias, thought the holiday was too much like the magic and freakishness he tried so hard to beat out of Severus and his mother, and would not allow it to be celebrated at all.

Add to that the murder of Lily Potter, his only friend and the only woman he loved unconditionally, and Severus would now say he despised the wretched day.

It was nearly sixteen years ago that Severus had made the mistake of telling the prophecy to the Dark Lord; sixteen years ago, at the stroke of midnight, that the Dark Lord killed Lily. If he had known then whom the prophecy was about, he would have taken that knowledge to his grave.

Pushing open the wrought iron gate, Severus entered the little cemetery at the side of the church. Rows of old and crumbling headstones stood on either side of him as he walked towards the two that were the newest looking. The two that should not be there. The two for which he bore sole responsibility for being there.

As he reached the headstones which read James and Lily Potter, the wind picked up, causing the fallen autumn leaves to dance around his feet and his hair to blow across his eyes. It caused the branches of the trees to scrape against the building as if in warning. It was as if the wind knew he should not be here, knew of the sins in his past.

Overcome with those sins, Severus fell to his knees, his forehead just barely touching Lily's name on the stone, and wept as he did that first Halloween night. He wept for the loss of friendship. He wept for Lily never getting to see her son grow up. He wept for Harry not having the chance to know his parents. He wept for not being strong enough to withstand the lure of the Dark Lord. He wept for forgiveness from whomever was willing to give it, although he knew he did not deserve it.

The bells of the church rang out once again. It was midnight; the Witching Hour. As the twelfth and last chime echoed across the cemetery, a whisper carried on the wind seemed to follow.

"Severus..."

Snape's head snapped up, his black, tear-rimmed eyes searching the darkness. To his utter surprise, standing on the grave next to him was the ethereal, greenish glow of an apparition: the ghost of James Potter.

Snape grabbed Lily's headstone to steady himself as he recoiled in shock.

"Y-you," was all he managed to croak. One hand had instinctively flown to his pocket to retrieve his wand, even though he knew spells were useless against spirits. But Severus had always associated James Potter with hexes and jinxes, and even now his instinct was to defend himself from attack.

"I know I'm not who you came here to mourn tonight," the ghost of James Potter said calmly, staring down at his old adversary.

It had taken only seconds for Severus to recover his senses. "Happy, are you, Potter?" he hissed, tears still stinging his cheeks. "Seeing me weep on Lily's tomb? Even in death you cannot help but mock me, can you?"

Severus could not go on. The white-hot lump in his throat would not allow him to.

But James did not look happy. In fact, he looked ashamed.

"I am sorry, Severus," James said sincerely. "I am sorry for everything that Sirius and I put you through at Hogwarts. You did not deserve it."

Snape felt wrong-footed by this. He'd expected ridicule, not regret. "I don't need an apology from you, Potter!" he snapped hoarsely in response, lashing out like a cobra, his hand gripped firmly around his wand.

James smiled sadly. "Even after all this time, you have so much anger in you. So much anger at me, and yet so much love for Lily." He looked meaningfully at Severus, who swallowed drily. This time, Severus was genuinely lost for words.

"I owe you thanks as well as an apology, Severus," James continued, gazing down benevolently at the hunched figure in black. "You risk your life daily for the son of the man you hate and the woman you have always loved. And if you did not, there would be no hope left for the world. Thank you."

Snape's grip on his wand lessened in surprise. How did Potter know his feelings for Lily? And why wasn't Potter furious about that? Was he really grateful? And where was Lily?

Snape looked up at James' face and was about to speak when he saw that the apparition had started to fade.

"I don't have much time," James said urgently, glancing at the church clock. "Please, listen to me. Lily is grateful for all you have done for Harry. She wants you to know she has forgiven you for whatever has happened in the past. And..." It seemed to take James a great deal of effort to say the next sentence. "She sends you her love."

Snape inhaled with shock, his heart hammering fast in his chest. The ghost of James Potter smiled and faded into the darkness, leaving Severus Snape on the tomb of his beloved Lily and the thoughts of her love.