

Silent Suppers

by moiramountain

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Chapter 1 of 1

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SILENT SUPPERS

In the first years, those soon after, she'd felt no reason to observe the silent suppers of Samhain. The dead needed no encouragement to sit with her. They were always present, whether she welcomed them or nay. It made no matter. They came.

All... save one.

"Remember us, remember now, remember always."

As if remembrance was impossible.

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In the middle years, the dead began to wait more patiently for her invitation.

Tradition decreed naught but trappings of black—candles, linen, even china—the light to be summoned only by the flames of log and taper, the glint of heavy silver. Always, there must be a vacant chair, decked in the guise of ravens' wings, awaiting its ethereal guest. The food must be plain. The wine must be the red of heart's blood. And the air... That must be thickly scented with the perfumes of the tomb—sandalwood and myrrh.

She refused tradition.

Her Samhain tables, she dressed in snowy damask and crowned with the crest-emblazoned china and silver of each House, blessing her rooms with crystalline slivers of light and color, reflecting in a thousand rainbows from the goblets and decanters. The waiting chair sat in ivory-cushioned anticipation. The food was savory with spice. Her wines were golden-hued, fragrant with apple, her whiskey dark with smoke. And the air... A balm of healing, sweetened with the breath of verbenas, rich with the eternal promise of cedar.

She would acknowledge death, granting the honor so deserved... but not with black, never with black. Black belonged to only one.

And, quietly, they came, savoring the food, approving the wine—their translucence growing rosy from the warmth of fire and spirits. Eventually, each one spoke of times past, lingering with her for moments that sometimes stretched to that precious hour just before dawn, and smiling softly when she inquired as to their lives beyond the Veil.

All... save one.

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As she had grown ancient, it was Albus who came most often, casting his own slivers of light in robes of purple and silver. They had long since made their peace.

The last three Samhain past, as he'd risen to depart, he had offered his hand. Did she wish to go?

No, not yet. She would stay, a little longer.

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It had been tiring, tonight, laying the cloth, lighting the candles, placing the two settings. Her body had felt as insubstantial as ash, the veins of her hands like fading runes on crumbling paper. The story of her life, written there, and such a fiercely guarded text, with certain pages read by none... save one.

The whiskey, alive with flame on her tongue, as the clock made its midnight chiming...

Quiet footsteps... and a shadow, enfolding her... the only black she'd ever yearned to welcome to a silent Samhain supper.

"Who's there?"

The same question she'd offered fifty years before, already knowing. Dreading the answer, then, and praying for it, now.

A strong hand on her shoulder... Against her cheek, a caress of breath.

And close at her ear, the end of silence.

"Minerva, it is I."

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AUTHOR'S NOTE: In Celtic tradition, it was long the custom of Samhain, just at midnight, to partake in a meal—keeping absolute silence, waiting for a spirit whose company was sought to pass through the Veil and spend time with the living. My dear beta wrote a beautiful piece about silence between Severus and Minerva, and I was inspired to follow that thought in a somewhat different direction. Of course, these visitors are Jo's creations but they do come by from time to time... in silence.