

When I Lay Me Down to Sleep

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Chapter 1 of 1

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'No! Don't take her! *Please... have mercy... have mercy...*'

Severus Snape, Headmaster of Hogwarts, sat bolt upright in bed, wild-eyed and gasping with terror.

Ever since the Muggle-born Registration Committee had been established, his nights had been plagued by dreams of Lily Evans up before the Committee, pleading not just for her freedom but for her life. He had woken night after night, in a cold sweat, having failed to save Lily again. Having condemned her to death. Again.

Recovering his wits, he curled into a ball, clutched the fragment of photograph he kept always under his pillow, and wept.

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'Not her! Not her! *Please – I'll do anything –*'

The next night it was the same: the dream, the terror, the pleading.

RAT-TAT-TAT

Severus went from terror to embarrassment that someone had heard him crying.

'Go away!'

But whoever was outside the door didn't go away. They knocked again.

'Leave me alone!'

This too was ignored. The knocking became more insistent.

Swearing loudly, Severus heaved himself out of bed and opened the door. Outside was a house-elf. A house-elf not in the Hogwarts uniform, but a very unkempt skirt and blouse.

Severus stared. 'What the devil do you mean by...'

'Winky is sorry, sir. Winky was on the way to... er... the seventh floor, sir, and Winky heard Professor Snape cry out, sir. Winky wondered if she could help Professor Snape.'

'The seventh floor?' Severus asked, stupidly.

Winky looked down at the floor. 'The Come and Go Room, sir. Winky is looking for Butterbeer, sir,' she whispered.

Severus ignored this. 'What do you mean, help?'" he asked.

Winky didn't look up. 'Master Barty is used to have nightmares about Azkaban,' she said softly.

Severus opened the door wider. 'Come in,' he instructed, with more authority than he felt.

Winky trotted into the room and perched on the edge of the bed. Snape followed her and, feeling very self-conscious, got back into bed.

Winky regarded Severus with wide brown eyes. 'Professor Snape should take Dreamless Sleep, sir,' she pronounced.

'I can't,' Snape said curtly.

Winky didn't reply; she just sat looking at him until he felt compelled to explain.

Years ago, after...after... she... died, the nightmares were far worse than this. Dreamless Sleep was the only way to cope. I took it every night for a year. Now...' He took a deep breath, and made his confession. 'I'm addicted. I am free of it now, but I can never take it again.'

Winky was unfazed. She simply tucked her wizened little legs up underneath her on the bed and began to sing: not a lullaby, but a chanted spell, not unlike the counter-curse to *Sectumsempra* Snape himself had used on Malfoy last year.

Severus was usually scared to close his eyes at night, terrified of what new horror sleep would bring, but the song comforted him. He felt protected, encircled by a charm which would keep the nightmares at bay. As the song progressed, however, he became aware that the elf was shivering. The notes vibrated as she shook, and she was clearly trying hard not to let her teeth chatter.

'Get into bed, Winky,' he mumbled sleepily.

The singing stopped abruptly as the elf gave a startled squeak, and her eyes widened to the size of saucers.

Even half-asleep, Severus realised how that had sounded. 'Oh, don't be ridiculous!' he snapped.

The huge brown eyes filled with tears.

'I apologise,' Snape conceded, 'I'm tired. But I won't have you freeze to death.'

Blinking the tears away, Winky sat stiffly upright against the headboard and pulled the blankets up to her chin.

Reflecting wryly that this was the first time in years he had had anyone in his bed, and it was a bloody house-elf, Severus drifted off to sleep.

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'Does Professor Snape wish Winky to sit up with him tonight as well, sir?'

Severus had woken that morning feeling refreshed and energised for the first time in months, but was painfully aware that Winky hadn't slept at all. She was pale and, despite the blankets tucked firmly around her, still shivering.

'When will you sleep, Winky, if you have to work?'

'Winky will sleep in the kitchens, sir. The other house-elves ignores Winky since Dobby left, sir.'

With a contemptuous snort, Severus flicked his wand. A doll-sized bed appeared at the foot of his own.

'You can sleep here, Winky. Don't worry; I won't disturb you. I have something to which I must attend.'

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When Severus entered his bedroom that evening, he saw immediately that he had been right in his supposition. Winky was tossing and turning, winding the blankets around herself, and her skin had acquired a greyish tinge and a sheen of perspiration.

Shaking her shoulder gently to wake her, Severus held a goblet out. 'Drink this, Winky.'

She groaned and attempted weakly to push him away, but he persisted. 'Drink it. It will help.'

The little elf gulped feebly at the potion. Within moments her skin regained a normal colour – well, normal for a house-elf – and she looked brighter.

'What did sir just give Winky?'

'Something of my own invention. A modified Pepperup Potion. It helps with withdrawal symptoms. I found it very effective years ago.'

The elf beamed. 'Thank you, Master Snape. Winky is feeling much, much better now, sir.'

Surprised, but gratified at the term of address, Severus actually found himself smiling back. Rumour in the castle had it that Winky had turned to drink to obliterate the shame of being dismissed from her last post. If she had decided to adopt him as her new master, she might never need Butterbeer again.

It seemed their strange new arrangement might be mutually beneficial after all.

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From an old prompt by Savine Snape: Severus is having nightmares. Who calms him and how?

The idea of Snape being addicted to Dreamless Sleep is not my own. I stole it from 'In Your Dreams' by duj on Sycophant Hex, and I am very grateful for it.

The title is the first line of the 'Evening Prayer' from the opera 'Hansel and Gretel':

'When I lay me down to sleep,

Fourteen angels watch do keep.'