

Five Funerals

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Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: Beta'd by leianora. This was originally written as a gift fic for hp_summergen on LJ. Then I realized I had written exactly what the recipient didn't want. I think this is one of the best fics I've written, so I decided to share. I hope you enjoy.

Oh, and as always, I own nothing you recognize, and comments and criticisms are beautiful things.

It wasn't often that Severus Snape allowed himself to get royally pissed. Tonight, he would make an exception to that rule of self-preservation and let it all go. After all, it wasn't as though he had anything left to preserve, per se. Everyone knew where his loyalties lay after he indulged in what had to be the single most satisfying moment of his life: killing Albus Dumbledore.

With that single act, he had set himself free of the vicious cycle of half-truths that defined his existence for far longer than he cared to remember. Sitting in his high backed reading chair at home, he poured himself a glass of scotch. Downing the smooth single-malt scotch in one burning gulp, he sighed, exasperated with himself. It wasn't that he hated half-breeds: his own self-loathing didn't go that far, and the gods themselves knew he never knowingly harmed a child. He may have terrified them within an inch of their lives, but what was growing up without a few psychological scars? Students like Longbottom were better for the experience.

He downed another glass of the smoky scotch, letting himself enjoy the peat-flavor. It was one of his quiet pleasures, the taste of scotch. It could course like fire down his throat or mellow in his mouth like chocolate. Gabrielle Delacour had probably never had scotch, more's the pity. He swallowed his third glass too quickly and choked on the fiery liquor. It was not his fault that she was there! It was not his fault that she was dead! That entire family was marked for death, and only a complete imbecile—or someone from another country—could think that staying with the *Weasleys* was safe!

The fourth glass followed the third down his throat, and the numbing powers of alcohol finally, finally, began to take effect. He had only informed the Dark Lord of a likely place that Potter may have run to ground. He had made a completely innocuous and offhanded mention of how fertile the entire family was around Greyback. He had no knowledge of the young girl's presence there. He was not responsible for her in any way.

He reminded himself that he had never hurt a child. Not even Potter, really, no matter what provocation he had faced. Had he known that the young Delacour girl would be at the Burrow, he would never have said a thing to the Dark Lord. He was sure of this. His self-image as an honorable man could not allow him to be responsible for a child's death. It simply wasn't done.

The fifth glass of scotch coated the wall after he threw the full glass as hard as he could. Shards of glass remained embedded in the thin walls, causing droplets of the drink to reflect like dirty rainbows. The now empty bottle followed, making a most satisfying shattering sound. The silent aftermath was a fitting tribute. After all, he could be fairly certain that Gabrielle Delacour had never tasted scotch.

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It wasn't often that Bill Weasley avoided his wife. It was just that, right now, he couldn't face her. They had lit the pyre for little Gabrielle three days ago and, somehow, that just seemed to break her. Fleur had never seemed so delicate before. He always marveled at her strength it was what he found most attractive about her. Even more than the unnatural allure her Veela heritage provided, he found her strength, her courage, lovely.

Now, she was just a shell of herself, hollowed by grief and guilt. Bill made his way down into their tiny kitchenette and grabbed the bottle of ouzo he picked up the last time he was in Turkey. If there was ever a time to drown his sorrows, it was now.

Throwing back the first shot, he shivered as it hit his throat and carved a trail down his esophagus to lie like lead in his stomach. He resealed the bottle before he gave in to the voice in the back of his head that said that numbing himself really was a good idea. Stepping onto the small ledge that their landlord called a balcony, he closed his eyes and let the night breeze, tainted by the city, caress his skin.

Idly, his fingers reached up to stroke the scars that marred his face. He remembered how Gabrielle had been so thrilled that he was a true blooded hero, how her tiny hands had stroked his face and traced the scars. How she whispered that she hoped to, one day, find someone like him. Someone who would fight for her and love her for herself.

He had invited her to spend the summer with his family. Fleur and Gabrielle were so close that, but for the difference in their ages, they could have been twins. He knew how special bonds between siblings were, and he knew that Gabrielle would enjoy having people who would treat her as a person, not as an object. So he had invited her, she had accepted, and they had surprised Fleur with her arrival last month.

He had been right about how much they would both enjoy the extended visit. Small comfort that was. She had become friends with Ginny of all people, who had taken to the young girl in a way she had never accepted Fleur. She had baked in the kitchen with his mother, and the sight of her face dusted with flour after an afternoon of baking was a joy. She had, in the few short days she had been here, filled his small flat and his mother's ramshackle home with peals of laughter.

The night wind slapped the scent of garbage, ripe with rotten meat, into his face. His reverie of happier moments ended and Bill went back inside. It was time to stop avoiding Fleur. Walking upstairs, he hoped he could get Fleur to have a drink with him. Maybe it would help her purge a bit of her grief. Maybe it would help drown a bit of his guilt.

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It wasn't often that Harry Potter experienced such clarity of purpose. He and Ginny had slipped away for a private moment, something unheard of at the Burrow. When they returned, Arthur was in St. Mungo's, Fleur's sister Gabrielle was dead, and the Burrow was in shambles. Putting the house to rights in the aftermath of the attack was a simple matter. Gabrielle had not been dead long enough for her blood to stain the worn wooden floors on Molly's kitchen. They had wrapped her corpse in a bed sheet and spelled it to preserve her until they could deal with the body.

Fleur had been like a robot, moving on automatic through the routines of preparing her sister's body for her funeral. As Harry watched the body spark, he remembered the little girl he felt so compelled to save during the Triwizard Tournament. She had been a tiny child then, half his size, and he had been small for his age. When he saw her again at Bill and Fleur's wedding, he had been surprised at how much she had grown.

During the reception, she had all but attached herself to his side, pestering him with questions in halting English and staring at him with those blue eyes. The obvious hero worship in her eyes made him distinctly uncomfortable. He had been helpless to save Cedric Diggory. He squandered his time with Sirius, and his own reckless mistake led his Godfather to his death. Professor Dumbledore forced him to watch his execution. Now, Gabrielle's death added to his burden. It was one more sign that his resolve had faltered yet again.

He was tired of watching people he loved, people he cared about die. Harry tried to convince himself it didn't matter anymore if it was his fault or not, but the flames of the funeral pyre were a constant reminder that he was shamefully alive and that someone who was wholly innocent in this mess was not.

Watching the fire consume the wood laid beneath her body, Harry squeezed Ginny's hand for support. He could do nothing for Gabrielle now; she was beyond any help he could offer her. Yet, he knew that he must end this. Without Dumbledore to lead them, the Order had devolved into a support group for those who Voldemort wanted dead. It was time to let go of the shades and fight for the living. No more strike and run tactics, no more skulking and hiding, trying to glean information from rumors whispered on the wind. It was time to strike. Harry wondered idly if Gabrielle would be pleased at the epiphany she had inadvertently purchased with her life. He hoped so. He was tired of funerals.

Standing silent even when everyone else left, he made himself watch Gabrielle's body burn until there was nothing but cold ash remaining. As the night wind stirred the wisps of dust that were left behind, Harry turned and walked away. He had work to do.

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It wasn't often that Fleur Weasley looked haggard. Three days curled up into a weeping ball would rob anyone of his or her beauty. Now, empty and calm for a brief time, she sat on the bed, staring blankly at the wall. Her sister, half her heart and the only person who understood her, really understood her, was gone. Gabrielle's body, her life, riven by the bloody battle of dominion in this filthy land! She could learn to hate this country and all that it held. Even Bill.

Oh, that thought burned her heart even as she choked on her tears she was too empty and worn out to shed. She could so easily learn to hate him. Veela were not meant to love. Their closest kin were Maenads and Harpies, neither of which looked upon men with care in their hearts. In between the waves of tears, she knew he had only invited her sister to visit out of love. He knew how much they missed one another, and he wanted to bring her pleasure. Damn him to hell for wanting her to be happy! She would be happier knowing her darling Gabrielle was alive safe and alive in France.

Fleur sat on her empty bed and rocked, clutching a lumpy and deformed pillow to her chest. A part of her whispered that she should turn on the light, take a shower, and talk to Bill. They had promised 'in sickness and health, in good times and bad' to be there for one another. If this didn't qualify, nothing ever would. She ignored that voice, drowning it in a litany of memories and blood.

She had been too busy trying to help Molly patch up Arthur, who had been struck with a curse that crushed his ribs, to worry about her sister. Gabrielle was small and smart; she could take care of herself. She knew very well when to fight and when to flee. When the werewolf had fled, Fleur went into the house for some healing potions Molly kept in the kitchen. The last sight she expected to see was that of her own sister, broken and bleeding on the floor.

She had held together until the day of the funeral, when she used her wand to spark the pyre for her sister. The crackling flame and that scent of cooking meat made her gag. She vomited and Apparated back to the tiny flat she and Bill called home. She had been locked in the bedroom, day and night since. Bill, sweet Bill, had given her space and left her be, but she knew that wouldn't last much longer. In the lulls between her weeping storms, she could hear him pacing outside the room.

Now, when he finally did intrude on her, she ignored him. Her loss left her too raw to see her husband, no matter how well intentioned he may have been. Yet, when the knocking on the door persisted, when Bill insisted, calling to her through the door, her resolve crumbled. Weak from hunger and finally empty of tears, she stumbled to the door to see what healing they could manage together.

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It wasn't often that Remus Lupin allowed his 'furry problem' to get away from him. Tonight, tonight he would make an exception. Guilt and shame filled him and all he wanted to do was scream until his lungs gave out. He knew he was a monster, but he never felt so ready to be a monster until now. Calmly, he left his cup full of Wolfsbane potion untouched, waiting for the last rays of the sun to flash and die. Once dusk settled in, he left his hovel and walked into the nearby forest to await the moon.

He never told anyone, but he could feel the passage of the moon through its phases. Better than any lunascope, he knew her vile phases and rhythms. It coursed in his

blood, ebbing and flowing like the tides themselves. For once, he wasn't afraid of it. Even when he had been a teenager at Hogwarts and plotted with James, Sirius, and Peter what adventures they would embark upon at the next full moon, he had been afraid of the werewolf in his skin. Not anymore. He knew that it would take a beast to stop Fenrir Greyback and, wouldn't you just know it, he happened to be one.

The first ray of moonlight struck his flesh, and he found his release. The sheer anger the change exacted on his flesh let him be free to grieve. The grotesque twisting of his bones writhing within his skin helped him shed the guilt he carried in his heart for bearing witness to what exactly he and his kind were capable of during their basest moments.

When his jaw dislocated itself to elongate for his canines, his screams were silent. When it returned, he howled. Now it was time for vengeance. Nose in the air, he scented his prey and an involuntary whimper escaped his throat. Beta wolves did not often challenge Alpha wolves. Then again, wolves did not kill the young. The whimper died, and his eyes shone with an unholy glee.

Gabrielle had only been, what, thirteen, fourteen? He hadn't known her well. He was only over for the free meal and the unflinching acceptance that he could only find at the Weasley home. When Greyback had been sighted near the Burrow, it was already too late for the family to run. They had been forced to stand and defend their home. He had fought as a wizard. In the crucible of battle, he proved to be a poor wizard and a poor defender. Tossed aside by Greyback in full bloodlust, he could do nothing to save anyone, even little Gabrielle. Now, the memory of her young, tender throat torn out and her blood a rich red pool around her made his mouth water. Earlier, when he had been too weak, too human, to stop Greyback, it had made him sick.

He wasn't weak anymore.

Loping on all fours, he caught Greyback's scent on the wind and began to hunt his prey.