

## **In the Bleak of the Night**

It was a bleak night, and a dense fog covered the landscape for miles around, its misty fingers curling around everything it touched like a clammy hand. Pale slivers of moonlight broke through on occasion, creating a shaft of light that was ethereal to look at; strange yet beautiful.

Severus Snape was sitting hunched at the bottom of a large oak tree, his rasping breaths being the only noise that could be heard. He pressed a shaking hand to his side, and cried aloud with pain, but it was a cry that no one was there to hear.

He closed his eyes and laid his head against the trunk of the tree, not caring that the rough bark cut sharply into his scalp. It was almost over now, it wouldn't be long. The low hoot and wide shadow of an owl above broke him from his reverie, and he glanced upwards, wondering if by some miracle, the owl would be coming to find him.

But the shadow passed over his head, and the next time he heard the hoot, it was a long distance away.

He chuckled, a low ironic chuckle, which turned into a cough that left him gasping for breath.

“It's too late for you now, Severus,” he said aloud, his voice harsh and cracked, sounding like a stranger even to his own ears.

Time was going too slowly, and the wound in his side was gaping painfully. Hot, sticky blood seeped between the fingers he held pressed against it, and he cursed himself for the thousandth time that night for dropping his wand.

It would be a relief though, death. A blessed relief to let go of this life that had plagued him for so long.

He thought back over his life, over the mistakes he had made. And there had been many – too many. And the biggest regret had been killing Dumbledore. He hadn't wanted to do it, hadn't even considered it as a possibility, but Albus had insisted, begged even.

He'd said that his life had come to an end, and he wanted to give Draco a chance to live. For if Dumbledore had not died, then Draco would surely have been killed by Voldemort.

And so Severus had killed him, killed the man who had looked after him and protected him more than any other person had in his life. The days and weeks that had followed had been some of the hardest in his life. He had had to pretend to Voldemort that he was still loyal to the Dark side, whilst at the same time making sure that he was never seen by any of the Order members. And throughout it all, he wallowed in a strange mixture of grief and regret, guilt and horror at what he had done.

Now he was here, alone in the darkness, slumped against a tree with his life slowly

being drained.

The Final Battle was probably still raging, all those many miles away, and Severus could only hope that Potter had succeeded and that Voldemort was no more. He wasn't sure how he had ended up in this field, one moment he had been fighting Lucius Malfoy, the next there had been a searing, white hot pain in his side, and then everything had gone black.

The next thing he knew, he was here, propped against the tree, with a long, slashed wound in his side. How long he had been there, he did not know.

For the next few hours, he slipped in and out of consciousness. The wound in his side was hurting less now, and an odd numbness had come over his body. The dawn light pierced through the mist, creating odd swirls in the air.

"I'm not long for this life," Severus mumbled aloud, his eyes sliding closed and his breathing becoming laboured.

The sun rose higher in the sky, and burned off the remainder of the fog. In one period of lucidity, Severus could see that he was sitting on the edge of a forest, a wide meadow sweeping across the landscape in front of him. If he hadn't been in so much pain, and if he were that sort of person, he would have said that it were breathtaking.

When he felt the last moments of his life slipping away, he hoped with all the strength he had left that Potter had been able to defeat Voldemort, to finally have rid the world of the man who had ruined it for so many years.

And then he was gone, his death seen by nobody but an inquisitive sparrow perched on the branch above him. His head lolled onto his shoulder, and his left arm slipped from its position on his lap, the sleeve folding upwards to reveal a pale, blemish free forearm.

The Dark Mark was gone.

**A/N: This was written for the "Snape's Turmoil" challenge at The Hogwarts Quill, the fanfiction site of The Hogwarts Experience. I firmly believe that Snape is bad, and so this story was very difficult to write!**