

Second Skin

by shefa

They come to him while he sleeps.

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Chapter 1 of 1

They come to him while he sleeps.

They stalk him while he sleeps.

Malevolent gusts of wind that blow through him, wrapping their long limbs around him with bonds far stronger than the ones already pledged in a fit of petulant rage.

He's never sure if it's *their* voices that find their way under his skin to burn in his blood—*screaming, pleading for mercy*, or if it's the clammy touch of terrified hands—memories that refuse to be—

Over now... it's over now...

—but insist that they *are* now... happening now, still.

Always.

Never to be laid to rest, but instead, worn like a second skin.

~~*~~

He hardly notices anymore. No longer keeping company only in dreams, their spirits cloak him as he sweeps through dark hallways, whispering in his ear when he might finally catch a moment's peace.

Days blur together—today and yesterday cracking into a shower of searing moments like crushed glass—each instant spent *in* this service captured in a twisted, fractured shard.

There is no present, not for him. Each moment he moves through a faded facsimile of horrors past, a chilling preview of those to come.

Sometimes, when they whisper, he wishes he could take their place in the shadows.

~~*~~

Buried beneath decades of lost lives and tortured screams, he is forever poised to explode.

An eager hand waving or the flash of green eyes ignites the inferno—his personal trifecta of rage, shame, and helplessness.

They will never leave him, he knows. They're as much part of him now as his fallow skin or the piercing intelligence that sometimes fails him.

And when Dumbledore reveals his endgame, when he asks him how many men and women he has watched die, he responds without a moment's thought—

"Lately, only those whom I could not save."*

Not even, especially not, himself.

*Quoted from JKR, "Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows"

Beta Thanks to Annie Talbot.