

# The Witch's Snare

*by lady\_rhian*

Annie, Elise, and Lula own a cafe on the dodgy end of Muggle Dublin. Whatever will they do when a certain couple walks through the door? Written as a birthday present for Annie Talbot, elise\_wanderer, and lulabelle72.

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*Chapter 1 of 1*

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Disclaimer: This is all for personal fun and enjoyment. No moolah is being made.

A/N: This ficlet was inspired by the birthday prompts given to me by fabulous trio of Annie Talbot, elise\_wanderer, and lulabelle72, all of whom were gracious enough to allow me the liberty of Mary Sue-ing them up in this story. You ladies rock! :-). Thanks also go to the delightful Shug for her beta work. Enjoy!

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### *Prologue*

At the end of a dingy street in south Dublin, tucked betwixt an opium den and an erotic bookstore, there lay a coffeeshop of ill repute. Not surprising, given its location.

But why, one may ask, had a coffeeshop developed ill repute?

Simple: it attracted the clientele of the surrounding businesses.

It was also run by three rather eccentric witches. Annie, Lula, and Elise had met on the train to Hogwarts one sunny day, an egregiously optimistic day as only eleven year olds can have. They had all, however, been sorted into Slytherin, and thus were the early bonds of friendship formed. They had become especially close after expressing mutual admiration for the handsome portrait of Slytherin's most notorious Head of House, a still portrait situated in the Common Room. It was lifeless, a fact which fueled the talk that the purportedly good Severus Snape was indeed not dead, as was widely believed.

The girls enjoyed a time of relative peace and prosperity at Hogwarts, having entered the year following the end of the Second War. All three were unique: there was Annie, "the smartest witch of her age!" according to McGonagall; Elise, "that exquisitely artistic joy," according to Flitwick; and Lula, "that purveyor of lewd materials unfit for an educational institution!" (professor's name withheld). What bound the women, no one knew. Only the still, soulless, unmoving eyes of Severus Snape's portrait were privy to the girls' Saturday ritual: rising early to drink coffee or tea at 6 a.m. and discuss the week's activities and, as they were in Slytherin, possible power plays. Perhaps. One never knows with Slytherins.

And so it was that upon graduation, the three friends formed a pact: they would give their chosen careers five years to develop, and if they found themselves unsatisfied, they would open a coffeeshop that also served tea in Dublin and "fuck the rest of the world," one of them said (the correct citation has been lost to history). Perhaps a bottle of Firewhisky was consumed on that fateful night at Hogwarts, and maybe it was sealed with blood (Educational Decree #123: Never make Vows when inebriated).

Suffice to say, however, that five years later, an overworked professor named Annie, an emotionally drained actress named Elise, and a painfully bored obituary writer

named Lula found themselves bound to their oath made in blood and whiskey. They were magically transported (blood magic, you know) to a rather dodgy street in Muggle Dublin and stood square in front of an empty building that said "FOR RENT." It was settled betwixt "interesting research opportunities," "suitably liberal establishments," and "fucking good fun!"

That was four years ago.

"The Witch's Snare" has been in business ever since.

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Monday, 19 September 2013

*The Witch's Snare, Muggle Dublin*

It was Elise's day to open the shop, which meant that she had been brewing coffee, boiling water for tea, taking orders, supervising the one employee on duty, and otherwise being wretchedly busy for the past three hours. The Witch's Snare opened at 6 a.m. sharp every morning, every day, and they were open til 10 p.m. Business was steady enough to keep them in the black a very frugal sort of black.

Elise had just finished the run of a play independently produced by a non-profit arts group in the area. It had been her first play in a long time, and the cast party the night before had been the sort of fun that always resorted in nasty consequences. She didn't usually come in to work until early afternoon; it had been utterly silly on her part to switch shifts with one of her friends at the moment, mental faculties slightly slowed from the night before, she couldn't recall which.

"Are you all right, Elise?" Maire asked, and Elise smiled kindly at the girl. Maire was a very young thing, barely eighteen years old, a petite, fresh faced, doe-eyed girl from a very conservative family. All three women suspected that working at the coffee shop was Maire's rebellious stage. The mere proximity of their shop to opium addicts and erotica would probably merit a hundred Hail Mary's of penance, were Maire to be caught. (They pretended that they weren't rather proud of that fact.)

"I'm well, Maire, just tired." Elise smiled as she pulled fresh cookies out of the oven. The heavy oak counter ran the length of the store, with the shelves of dishes, refrigerator, oven, cookware, espresso machine, and all other necessary appliances conveniently situated behind it. It created an open feel, and there was plenty of room to work.

"The play finished last night, yes?"

"Yes, it was closing night." Elise grinned as the bell at the door rang, and Annie walked in, arms loaded with brown grocery bags.

"Hi, Annie!" Maire said cheerfully.

"Hi, Maire. Thank you so much for opening for me, El," Annie said to Elise, whose eyes narrowed as she thought *Culprit!*

"What's wrong?" Annie asked.

Elise's eyes softened. "Long night last night."

"Charlie Astor wasn't at the cast party, was he?" Annie smirked, and Elise blushed.

Maire watched in fascination.

"These ingredients are for you, Madame Baker," Annie said, pushing the bags towards Elise. "I'm off to the back room." (The one room spelled to ensure privacy, silence, and invisibility to customers.)

"Payroll?" Elise asked.

"It's a bitch." Annie paused. "Has it been busy?"

"The usual," Maire offered. "Enough to keep us "

"Black as billowing robes," Elise and Annie said in tandem. They chuckled and returned to their duties.

As usual, Maire hadn't the faintest idea what they were talking about.

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An hour later, Lula strolled in with a hearty "Ho!" to Elise and Maire. She hung her magenta waist coat on the coat rack and brought the brown bag she carried over to the counter, a barely contained grin spread wide across her face.

"What did you do?" Maire asked cautiously, and Elise laughed.

"If you've broken a law, Lula..." Annie called from the back office.

"Then you would be in jail with me, dear," Lula finished. She reached into the bag and pulled out four books.

"The Scintillating Sins series!" Elise squealed. "Oh, you didn't!"

Lula squealed with her. "I did! The new one came out today, and I was first in line at the bookstore next door!"

Maire paled as she caught a glimpse of the cover.

"So this is book three..." Elise started as Annie sprinted out of the office, all of them grabbing their copy of the latest book in their favorite series.

Annie crinkled her nose upon seeing the cover. "He looks "

"Not as good as book one, we know, Annie. You said that for book two, as well," Lula said.

"Annie likes pirates..." Elise said in a sing-song voice.

"Book one had a pirate theme," Annie explained to a very forlorn-looking Maire.

"What " Maire started, and Lula thrust the fourth book from the bag into her hands. "Book one," she said. "We're going to educate you. This is *Priscilla the Proud, Philippe the Pirate*. You will read and enjoy," she finished authoritatively.

"What is it about?" Maire asked, wide-eyed.

The three women laughed.

"Thank you for picking these up," Annie said. "How much do I owe you for *Selena the Slothful, Sebastian the Spy*?" She could barely get through the title without cracking a smile.

"This round's on me. After all, you bought us all the first books, and Elise bought us the second." Lula shrugged.

"Those were both for Christmas!" Annie exclaimed.

"Well, this is Christmas come early," Lula said, waving a hand erratically. "The author must have been exceptionally inspired this year for the book to have come out so early."

After murmured agreement, all of them went to their designated tasks. As it was unusual for all three owners to be in the shop at the same time, this largely meant that they all chatted and laughed as they cleaned together and took turns making drinks for the occasional customer.

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An hour or so later, the three women were in the back office (slowly) doing payroll whilst talking about the latest development in Elise's relationship with Charlie when Maire peeked her head in the door.

"Umm " She cleared her throat.

"Yes?" they answered in unison.

"There's a customer who came in, and it's kind of strange being in the same room as him. I feel jumpy. There's this energy..." Maire trailed off.

Lula was the first to respond. "My darling, that's a sexual energy you're feeling."

"No." Maire shook her head emphatically. "He's got a big nose and long black hair. Not my type." She crinkled her nose. "It's in a ponytail. Very metro."

After the initial shock of Maire saying "metro" wore off, the three exchanged curious glances.

"Thank you, Maire," Annie said, shutting the door as Maire walked out. They all went to the spelled one-way window which allowed them to keep an eye on the café.

There was a collective gasp upon the sight of him, their teenage portrait fantasy come to life, in...

...a Muggle café on the seedy end of Dublin.

Their gasps and squeals were handily contained by the silencing charms protecting the room, and they all pressed their noses against the glass, fighting for room, as they stared, noting his black trousers and crisp white button-down. His hair was pulled back in a queue. "Not a ponytail," Annie said decidedly and he was "Sweet Jesus," Lula said, crossing herself sipping an espresso, completely relaxed. Fantasy come to life, indeed.

"He's not dead!" Elise whispered excitedly.

"He can't hear you, love," Lula said mildly.

"Definitely a sexual energy," Annie chimed in.

"Annie!" the other two exclaimed.

Annie shrugged. "I call it as I see it."

"Man is sex on legs, definitely," Lula said.

"I wonder what he's been doing all these years," Elise said, pensive.

"Now I really wish I was still working for *The Prophet*," Lula said.

"No, you don't," Annie and Elise said. "Besides," Annie continued, "they wouldn't let you print something like this."

"Why is he here?" Elise pressed. "I want to know." Her eyes suddenly lit up. "Turn the bug on! It's still there, isn't it?"

"You're brilliant," Lula said, having completely forgotten that they had bugged every table in the restaurant a few months ago in order to help the police on their "clean the streets of drugs" campaign. (Why the police didn't shut the opium den down, they had no idea.)

Annie turned the bug at Table 6 on high, and turned the speakers on so that they could hear.

Suddenly, the door opened, and in walked

"Is that Hermione Granger?" Annie asked, completely gobsmacked.

They watched the curly-haired, sweet-faced War Hero as she ordered a small dark roast from Maire.

Severus' eyes were on her the whole time.

"Are they together?" Elise whispered. "They must be."

"Lucky witch," Lula muttered.

"Wasn't she with Ron what's-his-face?" Annie asked.

"Ron Weasley. Divorced two years ago. No kids, thank Circe," Elise said. "She lives in London, though."

"Hermione," they heard Severus' voice say over the speaker, and they attentively watched through the window as she walked over to his table.

Severus took Hermione's hand and kissed it. "Happy Birthday," he said lowly, warmly, and the three women in the back room exchanged meaningful glances.

"Thank you!" Hermione beamed. "It's so good to see you." She brushed her fingers against his hand once more before she sat down.

"It's only been a week," Severus said.

"It feels like longer," Hermione replied. "I missed you." She reached for his hand, squeezed it, and let it go.

"How long have they been together, do you think?" Lula asked.

"They're brand new," Elise said.

"Oh, five, six months," Annie postulated.

"That's generous," Lula remarked, turning her attention back to the couple.

"...and I went to breakfast with Harry and Ginny this morning," Hermione was saying. "They asked if I was seeing Mum and Dad today." She snorted. "I realized that I'd forgotten to tell them that I went to Australia last week, while you were gone."

"Of course, they don't know about me, either," Severus remarked dryly.

"Mum inquired after you," Hermione offered.

"You sent her my regards, I trust?"

"As well as I could without her attempting to ask if you desired my hand," Hermione said, sighing. "I mean, that is utterly ridiculous! I was married once; I did my duty to the world or God or what have you. I'm done with that institution."

Severus remained unflustered. "She merely desires your happiness."

"But I am happy!" Hermione exclaimed. "I am happier than I have been in a very long time." She brushed her fingers against his on the table.

"As am I, Hermione. As am I."

There was a collective sigh in the back room.

He cleared his throat. "I have a proposition for you. Not marriage, mind."

She leaned forward. "I'm listening."

He took her hand in his, and when he removed it she was holding a key.

"The key to my flat. Would you like to move in with me?" he asked.

She gasped and held her other hand against her heart. "I know we've talked about it, but you're sure? It's only been six months..."

In the back room, Annie smirked.

"I am sure," he said, his voice strong and clear. "We can always find a new flat, if you like."

"Oh, Severus..." she said, taking his hand and kissing it. "Yes. Absolutely yes."

He remained still throughout the physical demonstration of affection, and he relaxed at her 'yes,' clearly relieved.

"Oh, bless his soul," Elise said warmly, and Lula squeezed her arm.

"There is someone waiting for you there, I might add," he said, sipping his espresso.

Hermione looked at him quizzically.

"A black feline of sorts who has yet to be named."

Hermione's eyes welled up with tears.

"You know I wasn't fond of your of Crookshanks but his death was untimely, to say the least. It has been a few months, and I thought you might like some new bestial companionship," he murmured.

"Thank you," Hermione said. "You are so thoughtful. It's soon, yes, but... I miss having a pet to look after."

"I know. I think I have become both lover and surrogate pet these last few months," Severus muttered, and she laughed.

"I can't wait to meet him," Hermione said.

"Her," Severus corrected. "She is quite eager to have someone to play with."

"Is Ichabad not meeting her needs?" Hermione teased.

"My cat does not play at nonsense, thank you," Severus said stoically, sending Hermione (and the girls in back) into another fit of giggles.

When she recovered, she looked at him seriously. "You are so good to me, Severus," she said. "Merlin, I could crawl up in your lap and kiss you senseless right here," she murmured, tracing a finger across his palm.

"Hello!" Lula exclaimed in the back room.

"There's an erotic bookstore next door," Severus said lowly, sending shivers down the spine of every woman within hearing distance. "And I do believe I saw the latest installment in your delightful series in the front window."

Hermione grinned. "It came out today."

The three women in back gaped.

"WHAT?"

"She wrote "

"Oh my God "

"*Selena the Slothful, Sebastian the Spy*," Severus mused. "No relation to me at all? Sebastian?"

She raised an eyebrow at him playfully. "None at all."

"Will you read this book to me, as well?" he asked lowly.

"Of course," Hermione murmured.

"What would the Department of Mysteries say, were they to know that their prize Unspeakable wrote Muggle erotica on the side?" Severus asked.

"I think my supervisor knows, but he's too much of a prude to ever ask about it," Hermion said cheerfully.

Severus laughed, a great resonant sound that filled the café. "Excellent. Shall we?" he asked, rising from his seat and offering her his arm, which she took as she stood.

"This is already a wonderful day," Hermione said. "I'm moving in with you, there's a new cat waiting for me, my latest book is out *and* you're cooking dinner. Oh, and this coffee was spectacular," she said. "However did you find this shop?"

"I felt the wards," he said quietly, his voice barely picking up on the electronic bug. "Someone here is a witch. An owner, probably, perhaps a manager."

The women in the back room squealed.

Severus and Hermione finally started to walk towards the door, calling "Thank you" to Maire.

"Come again!" Maire said sweetly.

"Oh yes, come again!" Lula said dramatically.

Severus paused as he held the door open for Hermione. "We will," he said, smirking and glancing towards the one-way window, and he then followed his beloved out the door.

Upon his glance towards them, the three women had fallen to the floor, and at last were recovered from their heaving breaths, but they looked at each other, surprised, incredulous, and gloriously entertained, and they started to laugh.

"Ho-ly shit," Lula said.

"I concur," Annie said, lying down on the floor.

"He's wonderful," Elise sighed.

They were silent for a moment before spiraling into rapturous laughter once more.

After a good ten minutes of laughing and reminiscing on their Hogwarts Saturdays where they drank coffee or tea in front of his portrait, they picked themselves up off the floor.

"So, ladies," Lula said. "As Elise is *finally* done with the play excellent though it was," she said, holding her hands up in innocence at Elise's playful glance, "shall we go to my place tonight? Wine, cheese, a dramatic reading of Selena and Sebastian?"

"Yes," was the emphatic agreement as they walked back out into the café that was The Witch's Snare.

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