

# Encounter of the Unusual Kind

by karelia

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: Never mine.

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So the cottage *was* inhabited; he'd wondered on his previous foray to that area of the forest. It had suddenly felt as if there was another human presence.

A woman, perhaps in her late thirties, was inspecting the small, fenced-in garden, as if to decide what to plant. Not that the woodland leant itself to a great variety of vegetables or flowers, though at least the plot itself was devoid of the deciduous trees making up the forest. And the lone rosemary, which he'd been harvesting since he'd discovered it, seemed to defy the elements with regularity. Given its size, it might as well have grown in Southern France.

*I don't want to share my forest*, he thought, irritated, and realized at the same time how irrational the thought was. His own dwelling was a good two miles from here, and the forest had more than enough to offer, though perhaps only one rosemary bush.

He startled when she looked up straight into his eyes. "Do you always stare?" she asked, sounding amused.

Something about her was familiar. He'd probably encountered her in a previous era, one he'd left behind some twenty years ago. His only contact with his former world was the occasional dinner with the Malfoys.

"My apologies. No, I do not. But *it's* unusual to encounter other humans here," he offered.

"Good to know I've made the right decision then," she said. Her smile was infectious, and he felt her magic crackle around her.

"I take it you're a witch?" He couldn't help himself; the question had tumbled out.

She nodded. "One who's had enough of civilization, Muggle or wizarding."

"Something I completely understand. I took off when I had the chance, and I must admit, life has become very tranquil and peaceful," he said, looking at her curiously.

He was surprised to see his own curiosity reflected in her features until, suddenly, her eyes widened with rapidly dawning comprehension.

"Professor Snape," she whispered, wrapping her arms closely around her chest. "The world thought you dead, but I never believed a word of it."

"I'd appreciate if you don't share your find with anyone," he said. Had anyone recognized him ten years ago, he'd have Obliviated them, but somehow, it didn't matter now.

She shook her head. "I've come here to figure out what to do with my life; I'm unlikely to come across anyone. As far as anyone in the wizarding world is concerned, I've rejoined the Muggle world and gone abroad." She shrugged. "And besides, even if I were still part of it, I'd not tell."

"I... I must go. Dinner isn't going to cook itself," he said and turned away, still no idea who she was beyond figuring he'd taught her at Hogwarts.

"I have a chicken baking in the oven. Perhaps you'd care to join me? I'll never finish an entire chicken myself," she offered.

"Chicken." He never cooked anything so elaborate for himself. "All right."

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"I want to keep the cottage," Hermione said, a hesitant tone in her voice.

His eyes met hers as he frowned. *Ah, this is the end then...* "All right." He turned his head and stared unseeingly out of the window. *Damn. I enjoy her company! One year isn't enough with her...*

He felt her approach but didn't move when she put her arms around his shoulders. "Severus," she whispered. "What's wrong?"

He shook his head, unable to speak as scenes of the recent past flashed through his mind. The first time they'd made love; when she'd brought her baking tray to make rosemary-crust baked chicken for him; their frequent hikes through the forest when she'd suddenly come to a halt to admire the coloring of a leaf. He sighed imperceptibly. It had been good while it had lasted...

"Severus, talk to me." She nudged him to turn around, and eventually, he did.

"Look, if you wish to leave..." he started, but was silenced by her cry of incredulity.

"What? What makes you think that?" She frowned, and then her lips sought his. *How* can you think that?" Her whisper still had a hint of incredulity, and a tiny spark of hope stirred inside him.

"I... you want to keep the cottage." His voice was flat.

She laughed then. "Oh, Severus. I think I need to gift you with some confidence. I want to keep the cottage because that way, we can be sure to have the forest to ourselves." Her lips brushed his again, but this time, he captured her mouth in a kiss.

When it finally ended, he relished the sensation of her head resting against his chest. "The gift of yourself beats everything," he murmured and slowly stirred her towards the sofa.

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A/N: Poor blue\_paris was *Imperioed* again to beta the ship she likes not. Thanks, my lovely!

Written for Corianderpie, who mentioned a forest and someone who seems like a stranger, but isn't.