

In the Valley of the Lily

by Amita

Mwahahahaha

Perambulator at the Crossroads of Fate

Chapter 1 of 2

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Chapter 1: Perambulator at the Crossroads of Fate

Quaint place, he had thought.

His spies had told him that this village was the location of the most serious threat to his power, the hiding place of the one prophesied to destroy him. But he had decided to be cautious. He had observed through the years that prophecies had a way of turning on one. He would observe. He would also reflect that merely observing might be the mechanism by which he was destroyed. This should prove interesting.

"Meowr."

"Do you have an evil cat?" he had asked.

"A What?"

He had realized he had made a mistake too much time amongst minions. But he had given the pet-store owner a few seconds to twist the reasonable question into something that might be profitable.

"Oh yes," the store owner had said. "Some people do like willful cats beyond their normal independence, I mean."

He had left with a caterwauling specimen that the owner had assured him had escaped from its cage, nailed two rats, and terrorized the guinea pigs. He had considered asking the owner to pay him for taking it off his hands, but had decided he had already revealed too much of his evil nature.

He had purchased an old house on a corner lot, a small mansion that had run down and had become too expensive to maintain. He rather liked the quiet grandeur of the place, and it wouldn't hurt to be known as an eccentric as long as it was a benign eccentric. To promote a benign reputation, he had hired work crews to repair the outside. He could use magic on the inside in the evenings when no one would notice. After the repair crews had finished the basic repairs and he had paid them, he had used some magic on the outside to turn the basic repairs into finished restoration. It wouldn't be noticed since everyone knew that simple maintenance improved a house beyond expectations. Finally, even though he looked thirty-five, he had said he was fifty-two, and he had evinced no interest in the village women. Everyone, except the gossips, had breathed a sigh of relief. He had passed the final test for acceptance as a benign eccentric. He was a retired pharmacologist who had made some lucky discoveries and who had invested well.

Now, he lived in his grand house and took long walks. His cat lounged in the front parlor or hunted mice in the fashionably wild yard surrounded by a high brick wall. On his walks, he met a young mother with her pram.

"And when I reached for the soap, I knocked the stoneware goblet over. I grabbed it before it fell to the floor, but it hit the edge of the counter and chipped its rim, which is better than breaking its stem on the floor," she said.

He nodded agreement and listened to more of the same.

After several days, those green eyes drew out the best even in him, and when she said, "I'm nattering on and on about my boring life, and you're listening patiently," he replied, "You must want to talk to someone."

"I didn't intend to be so obvious," she said. They completed the walk in silence.

Some best, he thought. *I hurt her feelings.*

Two days later, he saw her again as he was walking through the park. He waved and joined her, but after a few comments about the weather, she was silent.

"I hope my cat is safe behind the stone wall and has enough sense not to go wandering," he said.

"The wall is high enough to keep out dogs and kids," she said. "If it's clear on the inside, I don't think a cat could climb it."

"I'll check it for vines and any lumber leaning against it," he said. "That's a good idea."

He told her that he lived so simply that he didn't have any housekeeping stories to regale her with, and they parted.

The next day she said, "I'm certain you do something interesting. I can't believe you went from biochemical discoveries and business ventures to doing nothing. That's not good for you."

"I could plot to take over the world," he said.

She gave him a strange look and then laughed. "You're right," she said. "I'm being too serious."

She was telling him about the adventures of raising a child when they walked by his house and she and her sympathetic eyes said, "I've often wondered what you did to the interior. The exterior is splendid."

I'm being drawn out, he thought. *Perhaps I will draw her in.* He reflected. *Strange thought. Have to avoid those eyes.*

"Would you like a tea?" he asked.

I'm not avoiding things, he thought.

They went through an iron gate while being careful the cat didn't escape even though they couldn't see it, walked up a path through the wilds of the lawn, negotiated the stairs with the pram, and went through the foyer into the front parlor.

"Hmm," she said, looking around.

He supposed it was the piles of books stacked on the floor and the music tapes in cardboard boxes.

He did have a sofa and a chair and two tables. She sat on the sofa while he went to the kitchen to start the tea, and when he reentered she said, "You don't have any rugs. You could use a small one in front of the fireplace for your cat."

Always thinking of others, our Lily, he thought.

"Oh, maybe I shouldn't have said that," she said.

"It's considerate of you to think about the comfort of my cat," he said.

Green, sympathetic eyes were shining. "I can make amends by helping you shop. The next village over has a store with a wide selection."

He nodded and left to fix the tea. As he returned from the kitchen, he saw her assessing the piles of books and boxes of tapes. He decided to play a gracious game and said, "I make occasional trips to check my investments and meet old acquaintances, but I spend most evenings quietly." He put on an orchestral tape of 'Greensleeves' so that she would relax and enjoy her tea instead of fretting about the lack of bookshelves and music racks. Music has charms to soothe a charitable breast.

Buying a rug in the next village was more complicated than he had imagined it would be. They did have to take the bus since neither wished the other or anyone else to know they were enchanters. There was all the stuff for her son. They had to stop at a really good tea parlor when they arrived in the other village. He braced himself for a long session of rug selection.

"Look at this one," she said as they entered the rug store. "It's perfect for your cat. Don't you think so?"

It was back to the tea parlor to wait for the bus.

"Since you like music so much, I'm surprised you don't have your tapes organized so you can find anything you want without rummaging through all those cardboard boxes," she said.

He was thinking the purpose of the trip was an excursion out of the same old village, tea at a parlor that served delicious biscuits, and him as a captive audience, and because of these reflections, he didn't make an adequate defense of his cardboard boxes, which left him half promising to find a tape rack that would enhance the ambience of his front parlor with her help of course.

Their walks for the next two days made the rounds of the local furniture and antique dealers. They measured the size of audio tapes, calculated how much rack space he would need, and compared the cost and quality of furniture. They had a common purpose. They decided that for half the price of an antique, the local joiner could construct exactly what he needed.

"The fresh air on these walks is doing my son a world of good, and I'm certain your music collection has a calming effect on him," she said one afternoon as she sipped her tea and let a Haydn string quartet flow around her, "but this room reverberates. Do you think an oriental carpet would help?"

He looked into green eyes eager to bring out the best in his front parlor and wondered how long it would be before she mentioned the marvelous acoustic properties of bookshelves. When the quartet ended and he came back to earth, he recalled he hadn't protested her suggestion of a rug. The wench had taken unfair advantage of tea and Haydn.

He did not anticipate trouble, and he made his mistake when it happened.

He had always greeted the three teenage rowdies respectfully but severely. He would not criticize them, but he would take no impudence from them. This afternoon, however, the three truants had consumed some ale. And it was the first time he had encountered them while he and the green-eyed one were together.

"Hey, you got a girlfriend."

"Isn't he a bit old for you, lady?"

"You could do better with us."

"Yeah, we can show you a good time."

"We'll show you who's a real man."

When they charged toward him swinging their fists, he reacted too quickly. He mentally lashed out, and the three stumbled. In an attempt to cover his mistake, he swung his walking stick cracking the wrist of the first, whacking the knee of the second, and striking the elbow of the third.

"Oh, you brute," she cried as she dashed forward to tend their injuries.

She had reached the first and was about to look at his wrist when she stopped and backed away in horror.

She turned on him. "You make them right!"

He nodded, and the three assailants went from mind-blotted to confused to deciding they should take their bruises and leave.

She was glaring at him with her nostrils dilated. "Wandless. You did that without a wand."

She continued to glare at him. "And what else have you been hiding from me?"

He was about to say that she hadn't been completely honest either, but her hand was in front of her mouth and her eyes wide with alarm. She had revealed that she was a witch. She grabbed the pram and fled.

Two days later it was raining when there was a knock on the door. He opened it to find a wand in his face.

"Have you told anybody?" she demanded.

"There's no reason for me to tell anyone," he said.

"Swear," she said. "Swear a wizard's oath that you haven't told anyone."

He was thinking that in her agitated state she had not requested the right promise. "As a wizard, I swear I haven't told anyone that you are a witch," he said.

She relaxed. He knew he had to play the same game. "And can you say the same?" he asked.

She could and did. Afterwards, she stood in the rain for a moment while looking uncertain, and then she turned and vanished into the downpour.

He expected to shrug her off as a previous acquaintance best forgotten, but when he returned to his chair and his book, the room felt empty and the novel seemed trite. He was restless that evening. The next morning, after a solitary walk, the rug in front of the fireplace looked lonely even though the cat was on it. The tape rack looked out of place. He located his seldom-played tapes of Tchaikovsky.

Two days later, he was on his way to recovery and walking merrily through the park when he spotted her. His first impulse was to pivot and avoid her, but he decided feigned indifference was a better policy. He would nod politely to her as they passed. He noted she was bearing down on him with the pram. He wondered how the headline would read if he fell under its wheels.

She came to a determined stop in front of him. "Are you going to walk through the park?" she asked.

"Good morning," he said.

"Can I walk with you?" she asked.

After a minute of silent strolling, she said, "Have you thought about your bookshelves?"

He hadn't. She remarked that the major problems with a floor-to-ceiling structure was tilting if the floors weren't level and keeping it flush with the walls if they were uneven, but since the house was solid and level, it should be easy to build a set. Besides, he was a wizard. She went on to say that they could use cheap wood because she had found spells that would give it a quality look. She said she was still researching spells for finishing and varnishing.

She looked at him hopefully.

"We'll have to see what shelf size is needed for my books," he said.

He was thinking that her husband and his friends were fighting the good fight. They were risking their lives together every day on the battlefield and bonding together every evening in the pub. They had to trust each other implicitly, and they couldn't do that if one of them was odd-man-out who left them to go home to his wife.

As they walked back to his house for tea and book measurement, he took in the graceful way she moved and the lines of her face shaped by intelligence. For entertainment, he imagined her eyes looking deeply into his an amusing thought in its way.

Back at the house, her eyes bored into him, and she asked, "Does your telling people you were a pharmacologist mean you were a potions master? If you're able to make original discoveries shouldn't you continue? Wouldn't new remedies help your fellow wizards?"

Perhaps her eyes those deeply boring orbs wouldn't be as amusing as he first thought.

"I shouldn't tax you about your decision to retire," she relented. "It's your life. Besides, you're probably taking a sabbatical to refresh yourself. You've lots of good work ahead of you."

She smiled as his fulfilling future danced in front of her eyes, and then her eyes danced as they estimated the wall space, compared it to the volumes on the floor, and imagined filling the future shelves full of books.

"Have you unpacked all your books?" she asked. "Perhaps you haven't unpacked all your clothes either. When I saw how you were dressed, I thought you were a mild eccentric, but if you want to disguise yourself as a non-wizard, I can help."

Her appraising eyes shifted from the wall to him. "You're nicely proportioned. It'll be easy to choose some handsome clothes for you."

The only creature safe is my cat, and even that's not certain. She's petting it, and the way she's looking at it, she's probably planning how to bring out the best in it too. I should have sent the good professor in disguise to spy on her. The experience would cure him of his unrequited affliction and his eternal moping. A witch less good for him would be better for him.

Vortex Blaster

Chapter 2 of 2

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Chapter 2: Vortex Blaster

"They're falling."

"I'm on it."

He waved his wand to levitate two shelves worth of books cascading to the floor, a gentle wave that scuffed no cover and bent no page.

For resale value Lily Potter had high hopes of his reentering productive wizard society they were building a set of bookshelves using non-wizard techniques. It would not do for a new owner to discover his books re-shelving themselves. Now, they were exploring the wonders of screws and glue. She had wanted to cover all the walls with shelves. He had talked her into starting with the smallest wall. After a few adventures with a drill and screwdriver, he had found it easy to persuade her that they shouldn't rush the job and botch it.

"Care for a claret, rhymes with carrot?" he asked.

"Don't tell me you're one of those sophisticated people who object to the proper British pronunciation of foreign words," she said.

"It hurts the ear," he replied.

The last two days, after the morning walk, they had had lunch at the local tea parlor and had returned to his house to put up two shelves. Today, she had been stocking the shelves to check for fit when they collapsed. He suggested a break. The lines on her face had become deeper this last week. Her resting between drilling screw-holes had become longer and longer.

"What if I fall asleep?" she asked.

"I can watch your son while you nap," he said, handing her a glass of wine.

She sipped half the glass, stretched out on the sofa, and fell asleep to the soothing melodies of Mahler's Fifth.

He tried to read his Zane Grey novel instead of watching her, and he tried to tell himself that thoughts of lily-white thighs were most inappropriate.

The next day after their walk, he was fixing tea in his kitchen when there was a shriek from upstairs. He hadn't noticed that she had left the front parlor. He dashed up the stairs to find her in a room of opened boxes of books.

"I was looking for your books on potions, thinking you would like to have them handy," she said.

Thinking of enticing me back to work, he thought.

"I didn't find anything on potions, but I found those," she said, pointing at a box of books that radiated a distinctive aura. She was glaring at him.

She had found his dark materials.

She looked at him. "I left my wand downstairs." She stood proud. "Are you going to oblivate me ... or kill me?"

"I'm going to finish making our tea," he said, returning to the kitchen.

He heard her opening more boxes as he poured the boiling water over the leaves, rummaging through the books as he filled the cups, and sorting the volumes as he located the sugar. She was still at it as he sat in the parlor and sipped his tea. He assumed she was either determining what type of dark wizard she had to save or searching for some evidence that his soul could be salvaged.

An exasperated lady clomped down the stairs, threw herself onto the sofa, swigged half a cup of tea, and said, "I found your latest set of research notes. Vortex blaster? Why conjure a spell for that? Why would one want to blast a vortex?" she asked.

"No, no, it uses a vortex to blast," he replied.

She did not look enlightened.

He improvised. "An area-effect weapon," he stated. "In case one is facing a horde of Death" He stopped. The expression on his face said that he had committed an indiscretion.

Her eyes slowly changed from the fire of antagonism to the light of understanding. "Oh," she said.

"I was speaking hypothetically of course," he said.

"Yes, hypothetically," she replied.

"Speaking hypothetically," she said, "I had no idea you actively opposed you-know-who."

You-know-who? he thought.

"It's coming together," she said. "I feel like I've been slow witted your funny pronunciation, your quaint clothes, your appearing out of nowhere, your regularly disappearing at night."

How does she know I disappear at night? he thought.

She continued. "You must work on the continent and use this place as a refuge. As for your choice of weapons, the people you work with simply have an attitude toward the conflict different from the people I know. Still, it's a shock discovering the side of light uses such tactics."

"Those who hunt the dragon become the dragon," he said.

"I hadn't considered that, but I should. I'm starting to worry about my husband and his friends," she said. "It's Remus, really, that's changing. I used to look into his eyes and feel an urge to become better, but now, his gentle eyes are cloudy. I never realized what it took to oppose evil. You probably do only what is necessary."

"Seriously misunderstood creatures, Dark Wizards," he said.

"I'm starting to understand you," she said. "For a while, I was thinking part of your soul was missing."

"It seems that way sometimes," he said.

"I've probably insulted you. I'm sorry," she said. "I'm ashamed; I've been thinking poorly of you when you're scarred by combat. It must be very hard scouring the countryside for his minions."

He stood, assumed a haughty pose, and pointed to his left.

They seek him here.

He lifted his nose higher in the air and pointed to his right.

They seek him there.

He formed binoculars with his fingers and looked around.

The wizards seek him everywhere.

He pointed to the sky.

Is he in the ceiling?

He pointed toward the ground.

Or below the floor?

He used his finger as punctuation.

That damned ... elusive ... Valdemort.

Lily laughed and then said, "That's not funny." She paused. "Should we check your attic and cellar?"

"I did the first thing this morning," he said. "One never knows."

The next two days were uneventful as she came to grips with his being a Dark Wizard. The middle of the day consisted of a walk, lunch, putting up a shelf, and a nap for Lily. Everything was fine except he was beginning to think about her all the time.

There was a cure for Lily. He told her that he would be gone for a week to consult with his banker about his investments. The break was not as clean as he had hoped since she was the one person in the village that he could trust to take care of his cat and watch over his house for a suitable fee.

"You called, my lord?" asked Bellatrix.

"I'm back for a week, and I need help catching up on finances," he said.

"You're not telling me what you're doing when you're away," she stated.

"A delicate affair," he said. "Isn't it enough that I trust you to help with the accounts?"

She had to begin at the very beginning since he hadn't paid much attention to his finances and he had never allowed anyone else to examine them. It took several days to make a list of resources and contributions. Some accounts were overdrawn, and some were untouched. She wondered what had happened to make him take a more rational attitude toward his campaign. Whatever the motive, it benefited his cause. People who had thought they would never see the money they had loaned him became useful references and sources of information after Bellatrix had paid them back with interest.

He made no overt move, but let the shared activity and proximity and his open appreciation of her help have its effect.

"My brain is numb, and I'm dusty from all those old ledgers," she said at the end of the second day. "I'm going to have a bath and a sherry. Maybe I'll have a sherry, a bath with a sherry, and another sherry."

"You do need to relax," he said, standing behind her and placing his hands on her shoulders.

She gave a small start which she tried to hide. He hadn't touched her in some time. Was his current considerate attitude an attempt to mislead her and make the coming cruelty sharper? But as his fingers tended the taut muscles in her shoulders, neck, and upper back, she relaxed despite herself.

He extended mental tendrils.

You will have power. You will be by my side, and all will know it. Together we will ride across the sky of destiny and paint the world in our colors. We will have a dynasty that eclipses all other.

He leaned down, kissed her neck, and told her she was as competent as she was beautiful.

She stood and wrapped herself around him. "I missed you so much," she said.

"Make love to me. Make love to me as I take you," he said.

Oh, kinky, she thought.

He emerged from the bedroom an hour later, considered his choices, and virtuously opted for sherry instead of brandy. He should go easier on the tendrils he didn't have to found an entire dynasty that afternoon.

A week after he had left for his cure, he was back at his restored mansion. He saw the pram as he entered the front door, and he heard Lily bustling about in the kitchen. He declared himself to be home and walked down the hallway. Lily burst out of the kitchen, squealed, and had him in a clench.

His cock almost burst out; his tendrils almost reached out.

You will be my salvation. This is my life, and I can do naught else, but you will be between me and the precipice when there are no other barriers. You will pull me back from the utter depths when there seems no hope. You will restore me when I am damaged beyond repair. My existence will be dark, but there is a ray of sunshine, and my life will not be wasted.

Commonsense prevailed.

"Did you leave me any tea?" he asked.

She stepped back, sniffed, and smiled. "There are times I'm certain you have lost most of your soul, but it's for the best, I suppose."

She had her earnest days.

"Don't you think about what you are doing? I'm certain you're smarter than the people who hire you," she said.

"I expend my intelligence on surviving the mission, and I've lived longer than anyone who's hired me," he replied.

"But you could be making your own plans. Trying to do the world some good," she said.

"I may not be the planning type," he said.

"Maybe if someone encouraged you," she said.

She had her sentimental days.

"Oh, I think you'll like this," she said, handing him a small box. "It's special jasmine tea. I found it in the local shop. I couldn't believe they had it, but when I saw it, I had to buy it just for you."

She followed him to the kitchen where she watched him prepare the brew and helped him prepare the platter of teapot, cups, sugar, and biscuits. After the first cup, she looked at him intently.

"Everyone needs somebody," she said. "Really needs somebody. Somebody who is there to talk to, to do things with, to fight with, just to be around." She sighed. "I think we whither if we don't get the companionship we need. We slowly die inside. The world may think we're going about our business and leading a full life, but the days drag on and on and everything loses its sparkle and the hours become grey blurs. And we find ourselves doing anything just for some company, some interaction with another human being."

He poured her more jasmine tea.

"You're a good looking wizard. You must have someone somewhere," she said.

"I seem to have bad luck," he said. "I keep getting involved with inappropriate witches."

She put her cup down and walked behind him to massage his shoulders.

"You should relax," he said.

"This is relaxing," she said.

Her hands ran over his shoulders and his neck. Her hands ran through his locks and then over his chest as her cheek snuggled his hair. It must have been true that it was relaxing, for when she finished, she had a glow about her. She made herself comfortable on the sofa and fell asleep.

He watched her. Part of him wanted to finish the bookshelves with her; most of him wanted to make certain she got a decent lunch and her afternoon nap, but he didn't think he should wait to finish the bookcase with her. She would want to celebrate and all that that would imply. After she woke, gathered the pram and her stuff, and headed home, he finished the bookcase and packed. He had trouble sleeping because of visions of Lily with her husband and her enjoying every second of it.

When she approached the house the first morning in September, she knew he was gone. The mansion on the corner lot was an assemblage of wood and stone and hollow windows. It was an empty place. His vitality had left with him. She entered, hoping for a memento and cursing herself for wishing such a thing from a hard-headed wizard. Then she saw it, and the world bloomed again inside her.

Stuck to the fireplace mantle by a Bowie knife, was a Persian slipper. She appreciated the subtle hint of a mystery and wondered if he was hinting at a smoking shag. Inside the slipper was a note.

If I should not return, think this in sleep:
That there's some part of an embattled land
That flowers for us and is ours to keep.
In that far earth, now richer than sand,
A wizard lies who became aware
There's a Lily to love, such life to spare
That death cannot end something so rare.

Author's Note: The obvious parodies are from Doyle, 'The Scarlet Pimpernel,' and Brooke.