

# Rare Creatures

*by Rose of the West*

While cleaning up after the Battle of Hogwarts, Luna Lovegood finds a child's toy. When she returns the toy to its owner, a correspondence begins. For the LJ Snuna Exchange Community

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*Chapter 1 of 1*

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At some point in the days after the Battle of Hogwarts, after everyone had a chance to assess the damage both personal and to the building, Luna Lovegood was summoned to see Headmistress McGonagall. She made her way to the office and sat in the chair across from the older witch. "Hello, Professor. You wanted to see me?"

The professor looked at the young witch. A tattered jumper and dusty dungarees was a normal outfit for most of the students these days. The earrings were a bit odd. *Good gracious*, Minerva thought. She was looking at Rowena Ravenclaw's eyes from a stained glass window on the fourth floor. The girl must have retrieved them from the rubble. The elder witch recovered her aplomb and smiled kindly. "Yes, Luna. I hope you've rested and feel somewhat recovered from the battle?"

Luna nodded. "Yes. The Healers took care of my injuries. They were pretty minor. Then I got a good sleep."

"Excellent. I wanted to meet with you to tell you that I've taken the liberty of discussing your father with the Healers."

"My father? How...where...is he?"

"He's in St. Mungo's. He suffered greatly in the small battle that destroyed your family's home. He was also in the hands of the Death Eaters for a while. He is expected to recover."

Luna sat up and asked, "Will I be able to see him?"

"Yes, I've arranged for you to visit him shortly. However, I wanted to discuss with you what your plans should be after that."

The family house was destroyed, and her father was in the hospital. It did sound as though she was at least temporarily homeless. "Do you know where I can go?"

McGonagall smiled kindly. "As it happens, some of the professors and I have devised a plan. We would like you and some of the others to stay at Hogwarts over the summer and help us fix it up. It will be a sort of advanced Charms and Transfiguration course."

"What fun! But won't you use builders to fix the castle?"

"There will be magical builders involved, but the entire building contains enchantments and other magic, and we're going to assist in the work that is out of the ordinary. I

suspect you will be particularly useful in that work, Luna."

She thought for a little while. It sounded fascinating, and she might learn a few things that would help rebuild her own home. It seemed to solve all her other problems, too. She smiled. "I'll do it."

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They spent a full week on the partially charred Room of Requirement. The Fiendfyre had quenched itself after killing the wizard who started it. At the time, the room had been full of items that people wanted hidden for one reason or another. Many of those things were destroyed by the fire. The professors and students were carefully sifting through the items, disposing the destroyed or useless things forever and cataloging such items as might be valuable.

One of the probably useless items caught Luna's eye as she drew near. It was a coiled plush snake with button eyes and a red felt tongue. It was just the sort of thing given out in carnival games and belonged in the useless pile, but somehow she couldn't resist it. First she cast a spell Professor Flitwick had taught her to check for dangerous magic.

When she picked it up, she triggered a charm. A whispery childish voice said, "Please return this snake to me. It belongs at..." The snake gave its address, and Luna was decided. Someone had left it here for whatever reason, but maybe they wanted it back. She simply couldn't put it down.

The of-age students periodically left the school and went to London on Saturdays. On the next such trip, Luna went first to Flourish and Blotts to look in an atlas of Wizarding England. She found the town and street named and then located a pub nearby to which she could Floo. Within an hour of leaving Hogwarts, she was knocking on a door in a dingy mill town.

The door opened much more smoothly than she would have expected, and she saw a wizard wearing Healer robes. "Can I help you?" he asked.

"I'm here to return something that says it belongs here," she replied. She walked past the wizard and into a library. Her eyes shone with the idea of reading all those books. "Is this your house?" she asked.

"No, a patient of mine lives here."

"Oh, may I see your patient, then? I have something that wants to be here."

The Healer regarded her for a minute. Then he nodded his head and led her up some narrow stairs. She emerged into a hallway that led to a smallish bedroom. The floor seemed to slant down toward the window, making the room seem even smaller. There was a rustling at the bed, which drew her eye. She looked down into the face of...

"Professor Snape!" she said.

He coughed into a handkerchief and whispered, "Miss Lovegood."

"We all thought you were...Harry said..."

"You all thought wrong, and I chose to keep it that way."

"Oh."

"I suppose you're here for a reason?"

"Oh, yes." She reached into her bag and pulled out the snake. "I found this in the Room of Requirement, and it told me to bring it here."

Several expressions crossed his face ranging from wistful to rage, ending at annoyed. Her own face was taking on a dreamy look as she gazed upon more filled bookcases. "Are all those books yours?" she asked. "I would love to look through your library."

"I think you've done quite enough for one day," he snapped, still in that whisper. "You delivered the snake; now get out."

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The castle started to take on its regular appearance although some rooms were changed forever. The summer ended and the school year began. Quite a few students returned for an eighth year while others would never return.

School was interesting at the start of the school year, but the attention some students got from being part of Dumbledore's Army was short-lived. By the time the first Quidditch games were played, Luna found herself back on the sidelines of the cliques and in-crowds. By the November Hogsmeade Weekend, she heard a whispered "Loony Lovegood," in a hallway near the Charms classroom. She sighed.

The tang was out of school generally this year. One of Luna's favorite subjects in the past had been Potions. She had decided to create a particularly ambitious potion, but unfortunately Professor Slughorn wasn't quite equal to the task of advising her. She plugged away at it, even when her teacher suggested that she had taken it as close as she could get to what she wanted. It was at such moments, during her seventh year, that she realized the full value of her dreamy stare. When Professor Slughorn started to suggest that she had accomplished enough, she would simply start to think about her favorite rare creatures. A few minutes later Professor Slughorn would pat her arm and say, "Well, perhaps your next attempt will work."

Such was the situation one day in December when a strange owl flew toward Luna one morning at breakfast:

*10 Dec 1998*

*Dear Miss Lovegood,*

*I have been preparing to leave the country and realized that I failed to properly thank you for returning my toy snake. I realize you went out of your way to bring it to me, and at one time in my childhood, it was my favorite. I appreciate your effort on my behalf.*

*I hope your seventh year is going well. I expect that your N.E.W.T. scores will be as high as your O.W.L.s were.*

*Sincerely,*

*S. Snape.*

"Oh!" she said to the owl, who was busying itself with her half-eaten breakfast. "Would you stay for just a few minutes while I compose a reply?" The bird kept picking through her plate with its beak, which she took for an affirmative answer.

*11 Dec 1998*

*Dear Professor Snape,*

*Thank you for your note. I hope when you travel you will find time to look for some interesting creatures. Do beware of Nifflerhums. They make your passport disappear at just the wrong moment.*

*I am working on a potion that I can't quite get right. Professor Slughorn keeps telling me that it's fine, but it won't do what I need done. Would you look it over? Here is the recipe as I have most recently prepared it...*

Luna wasn't sure if Professor Snape would answer her note. Nothing ventured, nothing gained, however, and she really wanted to see this potion do what she hoped it would do. She stopped working on it on the chance he would answer and worked instead on studying for her Transfiguration N.E.W.T.s.

25 Feb 1999

Dear Miss Lovegood,

*Congratulations on getting your potion so far along. I take it that your house-mate, Miss Edgecombe, is the intended beneficiary? I considered various ingredients for a similar potion, but was unable to find the time to work on it. I would suggest that narcissus does not have the correct essence for your work. Have you tried the sister plant, daffodil? Rather than vanity, your potion might benefit from honest charm.*

*I have spent some time in the south of France during the winter. Thank you for your kind warning about the Niffler. I must confess that the only creature that has troubled me so far is one that made some of my gold disappear when I first arrived. I was surrounded by a group of noisy, wiggly children on the street, and some sort of Niffler did his work at that moment.*

*From here I travel to the Alps and then Italy. I trust your N.E.W.T studies continue to go well...*

Severus re-read his note in surprise. He hadn't intended to be so chatty, and was he playing along with the girl's interest in mythological creatures? He sighed. What could it hurt? She would get her suggestions, and that would be the end of it. At any rate, there was no time to re-write it, and he knew she would be on a schedule to finish that potion. There was no help for it.

He was surprised to receive a note some time later. An owl found him in the Tyrol region late in May.

5 May 1999

Dear Professor Snape,

*I hope when you are in the Alps, you will be able to see some Frosted Bowtruckles. They are very lucky creatures and help the Alpine Potions masters find their ingredients under the snow. Of course, first they have to find the Frosted Bowtruckles.*

*I keep meaning to thank you for helping me with the potion for Marietta. As you said, daffodil was just the right substitution. The scarring on her face is almost completely gone. I commented that the potion might also clear up the acne she had before the incident with the jinx. I guess it must have worked because she hasn't spoken to me since.*

*I have signed up for a career in working with orphaned and abandoned children. There are quite a few since the war ended. Professor Sprout says she thinks I might find something in common with them. I think she means because my mother died and now my father is at St. Mungo's while our house is re-built. We will be moving back in during the summer, though. It will be good to have things back to normal.*

*Will you be going to Sweden? I've always wanted to look for a Crumple-Horned Snorkack.*

Sincerely,

Luna Lovegood

He was surprised at how he enjoyed receiving a letter from England. It was oddly warming to consider that someone might be thinking of him back home. It was time to make a trip back to check on things at home. He suddenly had an idea that would enable him to take longer trips. He smirked to himself and grabbed an unused roll of parchment.

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Luna once again found herself knocking on the door of a dingy mill town terraced house. When the door opened, the occupant of the house looked down upon a young woman wearing a peasant skirt in a shade of raspberry and blouse of lime green. The dark blue hair band looked halfway normal until he realized it was a piece of a tapestry that used to hang across from the Charms classroom.

"Miss Lovegood? How kind of you to come." He guided her to the library where he had tea laid out.

"You said you wanted my help," she answered, serenely. "Did you bring an infestation of Zifflbugs home with you? It can be quite tricky to get rid of them once they take hold, I've heard."

It was hard not to smile in amusement. "No, I found that a potion based upon Doxycide worked quite well to repel the Zifflbugs. I was wondering if you would do me a favor, and I can offer you a bit of an exchange."

"If I can do you a favor, I would like to try."

He stood up, suddenly nervous. "I wonder if you could come to my house from time to time, say once per month, and look it over. Perhaps you could open the windows and check the fireplaces from time to time?"

She was nodding. "Certainly."

"In exchange, I would like you to feel free to borrow my books."

She took a deep breath as she delightedly looked around the library. "I can read your books?" He watched the dreamy look come to her eyes.

"You may borrow the ones in this library. The ones in the upstairs bedroom will continue to be off limits. Some of those books are dangerous, and I wouldn't want you to be hexed by one of them before I get a chance to tell you how to protect yourself."

"You will teach me?"

He hadn't meant to say that. "Well, er, yes, if you find that you need one of those books. Is this arrangement fair?"

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13 October 1999

Dear Professor Snape,

*I hope you are enjoying your trip along the Nile. I have visited your house twice since you left, and so far everything is in order. I've borrowed two of your books, and they've*

*been quite helpful. I've been training to start working with the children. Parts of it sound interesting.*

*I worry about you with the crocodiles that are known to be in the region you go to. Please take care.*

*Sincerely,*

*Luna Lovegood*

He re-read the note, looking for some sort of odd descriptor. Crocodiles were not imaginary creatures. He wondered if she was truly frightened of them. It was easy enough to dispel her fears. He had discovered a previously unknown benefit to some of his new clothing.

*16 Oct 1999*

*Dear Miss Lovegood,*

*I appreciate your worries on my behalf. Please rest assured that the crocodiles are not a concern for me. They seem to be afraid of my new snake-skin boots. I never previously thought that I would appreciate the Dark Lord's snake, yet Nagini has proven her worth this once. Whenever a crocodile comes near me, I make sure it sees the boots. I've heard they can move quite quickly to attack. The same appears to be true when they are frightened.*

*Working with children and teenagers has its challenges. I found that a stern hand from the earliest moments of the school year work best to establish the correct relationship, but that is for a classroom containing dangerous potions ingredients. I'm not sure if that's wanted in your situation, but I suspect you will find your best way to handle it.*

*Sincerely,*

*S. Snape.*

There, he thought to himself. That sounds rather collegial. He too often found himself trying to find the right balance between professor/student and adult to adult. Some of his students had gone on to have careers in Potions, but they always recognized him as their first teacher. It was harder when they moved into a profession with which he was less familiar.

As the months went on and he continued his travels through Africa, he found an unexpected bonus to his plan. Every month after visiting his home, Luna sent him a note detailing any changes she found to the house, grounds, or neighborhood. She included information about herself, too, and added those Luna-esque tidbits about Wizarding England in general that somehow delighted him. He was happy to be away from England and the troubles he had known there, he told himself repeatedly. It was good to have a regular correspondent whose well-written letters, surely due to helping her father with *The Quibbler*, kept whatever smidgen of homesickness he might feel at bay.

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*18 Feb 2001*

*Dear Professor Snape,*

*Did you ever find that the students tried to take advantage of you? Sometimes I suspect one or two of these kids are making their situation seem worse than it is in order to get something from me.*

*They say that Harry Potter has proposed to Ginny Weasley twice so far, but she refuses to give up the Holyhead Harpies for him. If she doesn't accept the third time, they say he's going to pick someone else. I think he must have been affected by the Umgubular Slashkilters that he had to clear out of Minister Fudge's old office. If he was going to pick someone else, why not just do it?*

*I hope you are still planning to stop at home for a week or two. I think your cauldrons miss you.*

*Sincerely,*

*Luna Lovegood*

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*Helping children through terrible times in their lives was hard* Luna thought to herself one evening as she walked home. It was about a year since she left Hogwarts, and she was ready to try something different. Whatever Professor Sprout might have thought, it was hard work to encourage the children to look forward to Hogwarts. One of the children she worked with in a group had discovered from a cousin that she was called "Loony Lovegood" at school, and the entire group looked at her differently. She was forced to ask another counselor into the room to deal with the mob that developed.

At least their home was fixed up. Dad was home and would have dinner cooking when she got there... unless he had a run of *The Quibbler* on the press. In that case, she would have to throw something together for him. As she went up the path, it was a nice surprise to see an owl waiting for her, an owl that was becoming familiar. He must have replied to her last letter.

*17 Apr 2001*

*Dear Miss Lovegood,*

*I'm sure you're better with the children than you suspect. They tried to take advantage of me during my first years of teaching, when I was not much older than some of them. As I got older, that became less of a problem.*

*I was like those children of yours in many ways, and small kindnesses have effects that might not be immediately visible. There was an awful afternoon at the home of my childhood, the very house you found me in, when my parents argued loudly enough for the entire block to hear. I sat on the front stoop, hoping my parents wouldn't think of me. A group of kids passed by who had been to some sort of street fair or carnival. One of the young men handed me a toy he had won at some game. His girl was a bit put off by a snake and he didn't want it for himself. Who knows? Perhaps some of my later decisions were tempered by the fact that not every Muggle I ever met wanted to hurt me. My mother taught me how to charm it with the message to bring it back to my home.*

*Oddly enough, that same snake caused me grief at Hogwarts, too. One day a fellow student caught a glimpse of it in my bag and chased me all over the seventh floor. I got into one hallway and paced back and forth, hoping for some place to put it when a door suddenly appeared and I tossed it into the room beyond. The other student and his friends were upon me soon after that, and my belongings were strewn from one end of that hall to another, but at least they didn't see my secret. Unfortunately, I was never able to go back for it.*

*The point I'm trying to make, Miss Lovegood, is that you never know what might make a difference in the lives of the children you work with.*

*I have to admit that I never saw any Sand-dolphins in my travels in North Africa. If I do I will be sure to send you pictures of them.*

*Sincerely,*

*S. Snape*

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He had enjoyed a long shower in his own bath and had just wrapped a towel around himself when he heard steps on the stairs. Grabbing his wand, he slid out the open door and looked down the hallway. "Intruders should either leave or prepare to protect themselves," he intoned.

A squeak came from the stairs, and he found himself face to face with his house-sitter. Her eyes were like Wedgewood saucers as she stared at him. He realized that he had dropped one of the ends of the towel, and so it hung from one hand at his hip. He had gotten used to different ideas of modesty in his travels and simply lowered his wand hand. He used the towel to dry his hair, which allowed him to look at her from under it while she stared at him frankly from head to toe.

She was still wearing the peasant blouses and skirts, which became her. Her color choices had become a bit more subdued. Pink and chocolate brown were not exactly matching colors, but the scheme worked together. She had put on... not exactly weight, since the shoulder exposed by the wide neckline was still thin. It was that she had developed more mature curves, he decided. He had a chance to wonder if she was wearing anything under the blouse, the way it molded around those perky...

"Um, Professor Snape, I guess you don't need me to open any windows, today."

He lowered the towel from his head to see that she had now fixed her eyes obstinately on his face. She was looking at him the same way she had done as a student when he would describe a particularly dangerous potion. He decided to sling the towel around his waist again. He would have had a reaction to any pretty girl looking at him so intently, but there was no reason to make things awkward.

"No, I can care for my own windows, but why don't you wait for me in the library? I'll get dressed and then fix us both tea."

He wasn't sure if she would be there or not. No doubt she had plenty of opportunities to experience men in all forms. How could they resist that soft hair, those ankles that peeked out from under the skirt, or the figure between the two? No doubt an older man and his passing... interest... would be a source of amusement at her next assignation.

He imagined her lying in a bed with one of his other students. Who, he wondered. Would she engage in romance with her co-conspirator in the DA? He shuddered. Not Longbottom, who likely didn't know what to do with a woman. What about her house mates? Boot, Corner, Carmichael, Davies... They all passed through his mind, but they were all boorish teen boys, more likely to crush a delicate flower like Miss Lovegood than properly enjoy her.

Perhaps... Zabini. Blaise was the one recent student who had the finesse and delicacy to properly woo and seduce the dreamy-eyed young woman. Snape pulled his shorts on over his obstinate body parts as he exacerbated the problem by imagining the two in bed together. The young wizard would hold her gently and pave his way with tender caresses. Her eyes would glow and her back would arch as she became eager...

"I have the tea ready," came her voice up the stairs. "Would you rather I bring it up?"

"NO!" he shouted down. "I'll be right there."

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He spent several years in North America. For all that the Americans spoke English and used many English conventions in their every-day life, their approach to many things was quite different. Magic was handled in ways that were foreign to him, and he spent months at a time in different regions, learning what he could and once or twice teaching a thing or two. To his surprise, he discovered that he enjoyed teaching after all, when the students were interested and learned so eagerly.

The notes that passed between them grew to a frequency of two or three per month. Severus wondered at the whim that kept him commenting on the mythical creatures she asked about. He knew he would never see a single one, yet he had gotten into the habit of responding as though he expected to see some of them any day. The letters continued, and he found himself enjoying the tie to home. Luna's voice had changed a bit. What had once been childish day dreams had matured to whimsy.

He came to realize that there was a lifelong sorrow attached to her behaviors and odd comments. She had lost her mother at a young age, and her experiences during the war had affected her. The other students of that time had buried themselves in rebuilding their world after the war. Eventually, they were able to act almost as if the war had never happened. Luna's spirit had reacted differently. In some ways she was as displaced as he, but she made the attempt to assimilate.

*31 Jul 2007*

*Dear Professor Snape,*

*Thank you for the kind note you sent about my father. He was never quite right after the war, although he tried hard enough. It was hard for him in the rebuilt house. He kept saying that the stones didn't know him any more. I know he had missed my mother, and more recently an infestation of Wrackspurts had gotten into his head.*

*I'm considering a change to my career. The children I started working with are all at Hogwarts now, except the one or two who have finished their educations and started working. It might be a good time for me to consider some changes to my life.*

*I've sold my house to George Weasley and his wife. They wanted to be near his parents, and our home is near the Burrow. I'm taking an apartment near Diagon Alley. It's not that large, but it's big enough for me to knock around in.*

*I always enjoyed making potions, so I may switch to something like that. I'm getting a bit old for it, though. Then again, I once dreamed of traveling the world and looking for rare creatures. I'm not sure, though. After reading your letters, I always think it would be a lonely job if one did it alone.*

*Your house is in good shape. I had the roofer come out and look at that one corner. His estimate is attached.*

*Sincerely,*

*Luna Lovegood*

He agonized over that letter for a couple of weeks. What changes was she contemplating? She had been close friends with the Longbottom boy. He remembered seeing her in the upstairs hallway of his house and decided it would be wrong, a violation of the universe. Luna was special, almost as rare a creature as the mythological ones she talked about. The thought of her marrying the bumbling Gryffindor turned his stomach until he remembered that Longbottom had married Hannah Abbott. He kept himself up nights thinking about the other young men who went to Hogwarts at the same time she did.

He was in the mountains of Tibet and eventually spent a long night watching the stars from his window. He made a decision but wasn't sure how to make it happen. He wrote his letter carefully, trying to say only what he wanted said.

*6 Aug 2007*

*Dear Luna,*

*I have have asked you several times now to call me Severus. After all these years of exchanging letters, I think you may be my closest friend. You should call me by my name.*

*I understand what you mean about making changes. You're also right about the loneliness. After all this time, I am finally tired of traveling alone. I think I'll come home and find a witch to travel with me. That way, when I look at the moon over the Great Wall of China, I will have someone to talk to about it. Perhaps we'll see some Heliopaths while we're there.*

*You've been counseling lost souls all of this time. Don't you agree that this shows some progress? I'm finally finding a use for other people in my life.*

*Meanwhile, I would like the roofers to simply re-do the whole thing. Their estimate for that work seems reasonable, and I believe I'll be spending more time at home in the near future. Could you go to my home and air things out a bit, just as you have been doing all along? I think I would appreciate having that done when I get back, even if it isn't for very long.*

*Sincerely,*

*Severus*

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She didn't know why she kept tearing up over every re-write of the letter she was sending. It wasn't as though she had any reason to think he was interested in her. Well, she had *one* reason, but it was years ago and it was an awkward situation. Surely he had found another woman who was more... more... normal.

Yet a normal woman wouldn't do at all for him. Her opinions about him had changed over the years, and the sort of woman he should be with changed in her mind, too. Her sixth year he was simply the face of evil, and in her mind he deserved some sort of hag. Then she understood, and he became the face of hidden good who probably had a hidden wife who was almost angelic. On that afternoon in his flat, he had gone from an aging, almost genderless teacher to a person who was very much a man... and one who was very much alive at that. She had stopped thinking about his women at that point, but now she returned to the subject. One didn't meet a person like Profes...er...Severus every day. The woman he married should be as extraordinary as he was.

*1 Sep 2007*

*Dear Severus,*

*I'm very happy that you've decided to find a wife. I do hope that you and she will be happy together. You might find Heliopaths near the Great Wall if you visit the Western end of it. Everyone knows their natural habitat is the Gobi Desert.*

*I hope you and she will be very happy together. I know from watching so many of my friends get married that it must be a wonderful thing.*

*Your house is aired out, just as you requested. I hope you don't mind that I borrowed your book, *Potions and Portents: a History of the Subtle Science*. I'll try to return it before you arrive again. I don't expect you will need to me look after your house afterwards.*

*Sincerely,*

*Luna*

Severus sniffed the letter as he always did. He wondered if she knew her letters smelled of honeysuckle. It was stained with many water droplets. It appeared that he had been too obtuse in his own letter. Her response told him what he needed to know, however. He smiled and used his wand to start packing.

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*November, 2008*

She almost didn't see the box among the crates and boxes that contained what now comprised her worldly possessions. It had her name on it but so did all the boxes. This one, however, was not in her handwriting. She recognized the handwriting and wondered what it could be. Perhaps it contained the scrolls she had sent to him over the years.

Using her wand, she opened the box and saw a plush golden eagle. She gasped and reached to pull it out. As she did, a charm activated and it started to speak, not in his childhood voice, but in his adult one. "Pack your things for a trip to Sweden, and bring your passport to the Ministry of Magic Registry office. I'll have the license."

She looked at the eagle and didn't understand at first. She put it down and picked it back up. It repeated the message verbatim.

"Oh," she said. She thought some more. "OH."

She put the eagle down and hurried to her bedroom to pack.

*A/N: This was written for a prompt given by pythia delphi: "Post-war; Snape lives. By some happenstance, Luna comes across a teddy bear (or some other 'security blanket') that belonged to a young Severus. Luna is determined to restore it to its rightful owner. In so doing, can she also restore his hopes and dreams?" I'm quite grateful to her for giving me so much "scope for imagination," as Anne of Green Gables would say.*

*I'm also grateful to Iulia Linnea at the LJ Snuna Exchange for running such a great community, found at [http://community.livejournal.com/snuna\\_exchange/](http://community.livejournal.com/snuna_exchange/). You can't beat Snuna for delicate romance. It's worth the time to see what's there.*

*Finally, as always, thanks to Trickie Woo for her virtual red pen.*