

Subterfuge

by karelia

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Chapter 1 of 1

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"No, Dumbledore, and that's my last word." Severus rose from his chair in the headmaster's office and turned to leave.

A heavy sigh followed a disgruntled "Fine," which Severus pointedly ignored. He had plans for the spring equinox, and short of the apocalypse, nothing would stop him, least of all Dumbledore's demands for stepping up patrols.

His breath quickened in anticipation of seeing her again. *An unlikely couple if ever there was one,* he chuckled inwardly and shrugged. It wasn't as if anyone knew—as if anyone *must* know.

Why the beautiful, elegant witch had grown fond of him, he had no idea, but he no longer questioned it. He didn't need his Legilimency skills to know her absolute transparency. "Drink," she'd urged him when he returned to the kitchen at Grimmauld Place after meeting with *them*, putting a steaming mug in his hand. The scent of ginger and lemongrass had taken the edge of the gory memories, dissipating his nausea.

It had been the first time he'd ingested anything at the dank Black residence. "Why?"

She'd laughed, instantly comprehending. "Because beneath all that scruffy, disdainful, sneering exterior and minimalist speech is a heart that is very much alive, Severus. You can fool others, but not me." Her smile, genuine, unguarded, full of life, had melted the heart he hadn't been aware he had.

His thoughts returning to the present, Severus stepped into the shower and enjoyed the hot water hammering on his skin. He knew the equinox ritual involved bathing, but it wouldn't do to retain a lingering taint from talking to the headmaster. It always left the same sensation of filth as meeting with the Dark Lord.

Her fingers touched his face in gentle movements that promised what had always seemed unreachable—happiness? Perhaps. "I've missed you."

He pulled her closer. "And I you." Lips met, at first hesitantly, but soon giving in to hunger stemming from too long a separation.

Finally, she moved her head. "Are you sure you want—"

"Yes. I have no doubts. Do you?"

"No." She met his steady gaze. "None at all."

He swallowed hard. "Shall we, then?" It was barely a whisper.

When she nodded, he took her hand and led her to a spring-fed pool on the edge of the copse. "Ready?"

Her gaze changed from unflinching to outright accepting as she undid his buttons and then, when his robe finally fell to the ground, to appreciating.

He returned the favor, though his eyes were filled with hunger, shifting to possessive pride as he freed her breasts from confinement.

Hand in hand they walked steadily into the pool until they reached the spring. The water was cold, but neither paid attention. The air was brisk, as if winter was unwilling to let go, yet neither minded. The sun was not trying hard enough to peek through the cloud cover, though that, too, was of no consequence. Each focused on cleansing the other with spring water, ensuring every hair, every inch of skin be touched by its purity.

The witch's blanket, dyed a subdued dark green with lichen harvested during the waxing harvest moon, its middle layer quilted with flighty dandelion flowers spelled to expand and cushion, and stitched perfectly with thread spun from angora and flax, had already spread itself on the ground, its top facing West as if to embrace the waning daylight.

Severus led his witch slowly to it, allowing a little time for the water to dissipate. Kneeling, he motioned for her to join him.

"One year and one day. And if all remains, we'll renew our vows then," he whispered, never taking his eyes off her.

She nodded solemnly. "One year and one day." Her hands cupped his face. "And now I'm yours, and yours alone." After kissing him, her mouth trailed downward, leaving a smattering of light touches behind that made his hairs stand in anticipation.

"And I am yours, and yours alone," he returned in a not quite steady voice. His eyes held hers until they closed of their own accord when her lips touched his again. *Soft. Perfect.*

She sensed when his body was losing patience, unwilling to wait any longer. "Come. Come to me." She touched him and led him home, and the world was no longer important.

When she ceased control and allowed her body to move of its own accord, he followed the lead and soon reached completion, spilling himself inside her perfect being.

Spent and content, he held her in his arms, letting the light breeze dry their bodies, the sun afford a glimpse of warmth, the deities look benignly upon them.

"May this handfasting be blessed by the god and goddess," they whispered in unison.

Snape stared at her mangled body, but years of constant alert reminded him harshly of Goyle's presence. The momentary expression of horror morphed into his usual sneer. "Deliver the body to her parents," he ordered his companion, his voice holding nothing but disdain.

Your death will not have been in vain, Em, he promised silently. Then, he left the gruesome murder scene, vowing to do everything necessary to bring down the Dark Lord even if it killed him.

A/N: The passage marked with an asterisk is quoted directly from Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince.

Grateful thanks to Janus for betaing and honesty and reassurance. I wish I remembered the day we met; I'd make it a holiday!