

The Scottish Play

by scaranda

Ever since the debacle of Camelot Severus has roamed the countries of Europe, searching for redemption in Merlin's eyes. Has he found it on a blasted Scottish heath? Enter Macbeth, stage left, and a heap of trouble with him.

Chapter One

Chapter 1 of 6

Ever since the debacle of Camelot Severus has roamed the countries of Europe, searching for redemption in Merlin's eyes. Has he found it on a blasted Scottish heath? Enter Macbeth, stage left, and a heap of trouble with him.

Author's notes: Any direct quotes from William Shakespeare's play "Macbeth" are in double quotation marks.

The Mage Lord lifted his head from the book of spells; his black hooded eyes squinted against the cold as he glanced across the wind blasted heath. He stamped his numb feet and rubbed his calloused, chapped hands. He could almost hear the chant of his three brides, a litany carried on the wind, only to be lost within her own mournful song.

"Double, double toil and trouble; fire burn and cauldron bubble."

He watched as Bellatrix let something drop into the cauldron, as the other two crones let their voices rise to unearthly shrieks, and the few crows, who had gathered to observe them, rose in a squabbling black cloud.

Severus smiled to himself as he pulled his black cloak around his lean frame in some attempt to ward off the chill. 'Who shall I take tonight, Aricathe?' he asked, bending to scratch his familiar behind her ragged ears. She rewarded him with a hiss of anger and a nip on the finger from her needle-pointed teeth. 'Who will warm my bones, my lovely?' Severus asked the cat, but she only drew him a long unforgiving look.

He began to cross the springy tangled heather to where the three witches still chanted their hellish blessing, but was only halfway there when a man and woman appeared at his side, their powerful magic crackling the air around him.

'Lord Merlin,' Snape said, inclining his head in greeting. 'My Fey Lady Morgaine.'

Snape had stifled his irritation well, quelling the feeling of unease that rose in the pit of his belly. He was displeased that Merlin had arrived at this time; he had wanted to be further on before explaining himself. That said, Merlin had been displeased with Severus for almost four hundred years, ever since the Sword of Godric the Great had been lost to the lake; so what, Severus mused, were another few days? It had all been Morgaine's fault anyway, he thought rather sourly, refusing to acknowledge that had he not allowed himself to succumb to her considerable charms, he might well have noticed what was going on elsewhere in Camelot. He put it away; he was four hundred miles, not to mention some four hundred years, away from Camelot now.

The old wizard had made no reply to Snape's greeting. Morgaine did though; her ruby red lips parted to display her small white even teeth, as though to let Severus compare her perfection to his three withered hags. Severus smiled to himself; what did he care what his brides showed to the world? What did he care if the world thought he lay with only toothless crones to suck his cock? It mattered not to him that no one but he saw the raven locks and white teeth and heavy milky breasts of his beloved Bellatrix; he didn't care that the world saw his beautiful Minerva as a bald-headed bearded beldam, and saw not the fiery red, tumbling mass of curls that crowned her head, nor the sea-green eyes that lusted only for him. He even cared not that his fairest Luna presented herself to all but him as a wall-eyed half-mad harpy, her quick wits

and lascivious tongue for him alone, well, him and one occasional other, Severus conceded. He drew a sharp little breath over his teeth as his cock twitched in longing at the thought of Luna's mouth. Tonight he would take Luna, he decided, even as he felt Morgaine's speculative look.

They began to walk again towards where the three witches laboured still over the cauldron. Minerva turned, hissing through her gums as she recognised the Fey, nudging Bellatrix and Luna. The three looked once to the their Mage Lord, dropping their disguising charms at his hidden assent, laughing in malicious delight as Morgaine drew back in belated recollection of the three beautiful witches she had banished from Camelot so long ago.

"Fair is foul, and foul is fair," all three shrieked at their old adversary. "Hover through the fog and filthy air."

Severus gave Merlin a sidelong look as the old wizard watched the three witches raise their charms again, hiding their beauty for only their Mage Lord, but their words not lost on one so wise.

'I had wondered what had contented thee so, my Severus,' Merlin murmured, nodding towards the cackling capering harpies.

'They sought me out, and I gave them shelter,' Snape replied.

'And Narcissa the Black?' Merlin queried. 'Andromeda too?'

Snape smiled inwardly yet again, this time letting a smirk twist the corner of his thin mirthless mouth. 'One lies with the worthy Thane of Glamis,' he replied, snorting inwardly in derision.

Merlin let his shaggy white eyebrow rise. 'Macbeth?' he said. 'Thou hast been industrious these years, after all. And the other?' he asked. 'Lieth she also with the noble blood of the north?'

Severus savoured his moment as they drew up to where his brides stood back from their hell broth. 'The fairest of them all is Banquo's bride,' he said at last, delivering his coup de grace.

'A witch to beget the future kings of Scotland...' Merlin threw back his head and laughed a great peeling sound of mirth. 'And the boy, Fleance?' he asked. 'Is he to be the one after all?'

'The whelp of Banquo and Andromeda the Black,' Snape replied, wishing only that his victory were as complete as it sounded.

The old wizard thrust an arm across Snape's shoulders in the way he had done when he had presented him with another poisoned chalice, four centuries before, and Snape resisted the urge to shake himself free, wondering if he were about to embark upon another such disaster.

'I truly had doubted thee not, my Severus,' Merlin said grandly.

Not much, you scheming old husk of malice, Snape thought, not at all unkindly. Ever since Merlin had fallen from the grace of the court after the death of Arthur, he had had Severus searching for a throne, as though the whole failure of Camelot had been his fault alone. Four hundred years of wandering the countries of Europe to atone for what had been but a few nights of passion, four hundred years of trying to match prophesy after useless prophecy to the princes of Germany and Italy and France.

Severus let his eyes slide to where the Fey stood at the edge of the clearing, letting his mind drift to memories of those cherry lips embracing his cock, even as his eyes did their own drifting over her body. No cloaks could hide her lush ripe breasts from his view, no kirtle shroud her plump buttocks or the greedy gobbling folds of her cunt. No woman was closed to Severus Snape. He sighed to himself at what had been his downfall.

Chapter Two

Chapter 2 of 6

Macbeth makes a brief entrance.

Author's notes: Any direct quotes from William Shakespeare's play "Macbeth" are in double quotation marks.

As the dusk began to fall across the moor the three witches dropped the charms they had cast across the entrance to their dwelling, and one by one they ducked inside, taking Merlin with them, until Severus was left alone outside with just the Fey.

'Well, Severus,' she said, breaking her silence at last, letting her pink tongue run across her top lip, and he remembered her throaty voice, and the way she hissed his name. 'Is even now your cock aloft?'

As he turned to face her, an owl swooped low across the space between them, like an early huntress searching for the unwary. The Fey pulled back in superstitious dread, and drew a fist to her mouth. 'Harbinger of doom,' she moaned, stumbling away to where the others had disappeared.

Harbinger of doom, my arse, Severus snorted to himself, as he watched Minerva waft back towards him to perch on his shoulder for a moment, before floating to the ground and changing form to his red-haired beauty.

'Worry not about the Fey, Mage Lord,' she whispered. 'From dawn tomorrow she will have lost the taste for your cock.'

Severus squinted at her in suspicion. 'What do you mean, witch?' he asked.

'We have seen to it that you will be troubled no more, Mage Lord,' Minerva replied, a smile of mischief, which Snape didn't like at all, creasing her face and crinkling her eyes. 'She will have grown a cock all of her own.' She drew back in feigned shock as he slapped her. 'A jest, a jest,' she cried. 'Naught but jest.'

He rubbed his hand down her smooth white cheek, his finger marks disappearing with his touch. 'Perhaps,' he purred. 'Yet you have given me the idea, so perhaps I shall let you all grow your own too.'

'Into what would you thrust your dagger then, Mage Lord?' she asked archly, as she took his arm to duck into the shelter. 'Aricanthe?' She looked down to where Snape's familiar hissed up at her in indignation.

The cave was filled with the smell of smoke and the scent of roasted rabbits. Severus watched the way the Fey gave Minerva a suspicious look, as though wondering how Minerva had preceded her inside the cave, and yet had just accompanied him inside. He doubted she would be unable to work out who the owl had been; after all, had Minerva's namesake, the goddess of old, not favoured the bird of wisdom?

Bellatrix brought his trencher of rabbit and dark rough bread, and a cup of warmed mead, and sat down beside him, close enough for him to scent the woman of her over the smell of the rabbit, close enough to see down the front of her bodice almost to where he knew her nipples had perked up at the contact. Perhaps he would lap at Bella's bosom tonight instead. Choices, choices, he sighed to himself. All three of his women had dropped their charms again, and he feasted his eyes as he filled his belly, smiling wryly to himself in the knowledge that they only did so to blot out the beauty of the Fey. Double, double toil and trouble indeed, he snorted to himself; he could smell trouble a mile off, even over the smell of wood smoke and rabbit and his beloved Bella's lovejuice.

They had finished their meal, and Snape had just thrown some herbs onto the fire pit so he and Merlin could inhale the fumes, when Bellatrix stood from beside him, her head cocked to the side as her raven hair spilled across her shoulders.

She went to the fire and threw a handful of dirt from the ground into it, before turning to Luna and Minerva.

'Raise thy charms, my sisters,' she said, and all three donned the façades they showed the world. Each took another handful of dirt from the floor, and threw it into the fire, as bright green sparks gobbled it up.

They stood listening at the entrance of the cave for many moments as Snape and Merlin and the Fey watched on. At last Minerva looked to the fire, to where it had returned to nothing more than a red and grey smouldering heap.

"A drum, a drum!" Luna hissed into the heavy silence. "Macbeth doth come." She glanced to the fire too. "Peace! The charm's wound up." And with that she followed her sisters out.

Severus had edged to the entrance of the cavern to where he could hear the three witches. They were cackling and squabbling like old crones, throwing the heads of the rabbits they had dined on into the cauldron. In the light of the fire he could make out two men approaching the clearing, as he felt Merlin draw close to him, the Fey at his other side.

"What are these, so withered and so wild in their attire?" the first man asked the second, as they passed close to the cave mouth.

"Tis Banquo who speaks," Severus murmured, his voice charmed away from those who should not hear it.

"The other is Macbeth?" Merlin asked.

Snape only had time to nod, as Macbeth drew up to almost where the three witches still pranced about the cauldron like madwomen.

"Speak if you can! What are you?" Macbeth called across to them.

"All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, thane of Glamis!" Minerva shrieked.

"All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, thane of Cawdor!" Luna cried.

"All hail, Macbeth! That shalt be king hereafter," Bellatrix finished on a note of triumph.

"What sayeth thy beldam?" Merlin hissed, as Severus closed his eyes briefly. The old wizard turned back to the entrance though before Snape could reply, as Minerva crossed to Banquo.

"Lesser than Macbeth, and greater," she said, sketching a blessing in the air in front of him.

"Not so happy, yet much happier," Luna added, drawing away, as Macbeth shot Banquo an uneasy look.

"Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none," Bellatrix added her own cryptic message to the clearly confused Banquo.

'Severus,' Merlin said. 'Carest thee to enlighten an old man?'

'I was about to explain, Lord Merlin,' Snape said much more smoothly than he felt. 'It is not such a long term plan to get Banquo's sons onto the throne as it may seem. I sought only to hedge our wagers, so to speak.'

'Speakest thee of Fleance, my boy?' Merlin asked in a way that made Snape think he didn't actually need the answer, that he had already seen through the woods to whatever trees hid beyond. 'Or usest thee the term "sons" more loosely.'

Luna ducked back into the cavern, leaving Bellatrix and Minerva to see off the two bemused fighting men, their cries of 'Hail! Hail!' raining on their retreating backs.

'Severus,' Merlin said with a weighty sigh, when it became apparent that Snape had not yet formulated a reply. 'I care not to wait yet four more centuries.'

'Not that long, Lord Merlin,' Luna interjected, one eye holding his, whilst the other wandered off to seek the Fey where she sat back at the remains of the cook fire, her own dark eyes a mystery. 'Macbeth will have no sons. My Mage Lord only seeks to placate Narcissa by letting her play with the crown of Scotland for a while.'

'Thou art sure of thy facts, Child of the Moon?' Merlin asked. 'I care not for this plan to go anymore awry that it seemeth to have gone thus far.'

'Oh yes, Lord Merlin,' Luna replied, and Severus noticed that she forgot to catch his eye along with all the others she met, as Minerva and Bella stepped back into the shelter too. 'Narcissa tells us that the strumpet the mighty warrior Macbeth now visits has a hairy arse and balls like a bullock. He cannot get his own up for her at all, and soon her poor cunt will shrivel up and die for lack of a manly cock,' she added with a sigh of sympathy.

'This seemeth rather complicated a plan, Severus,' Merlin murmured, letting his shaggy eyebrow rise again. 'Mayhap ill-conceived too?'

Severus sighed; it was beginning to become somewhat complicated to him too. 'Not at all, Lord Merlin,' he replied. 'Narcissa the Black has matters in hand.'

'And?' Merlin invited.

'And King Duncan dines with the Macbeths three days from now. Four days from now he will fail to wake up.'

'And?' Merlin asked again.

Severus didn't care to be interrogated in this way; he didn't care to feel under the pressure he had lived under in Camelot. He tried to shut that particular debacle from his mind, and concentrate on the fiasco in hand. 'And Duncan's two sons, Donalbain and Malcolm, will take the blame, leaving a vacant throne.'

For just a moment Severus thought he had pulled the wool over Merlin's eyes, a very short moment as it turned out.

'I see,' Merlin murmured, and Severus realised that indeed he did. 'And thinkest thee for one moment that any, save the thane of Glamis, will ascend the throne?'

'Not for long, Merlin,' Snape said, dropping the affectation of the "Lord" from his name, doubting though that the old man would even notice. 'Macbeth will leave no heirs; when he dies, his claim to Scotland's throne dies too.'

'Perhaps I am wrong, Severus; cruel eld maketh my wits less sharp than once they were,' Merlin said, as Snape waited for the rest with his teeth gritted. 'But I hear no mention of Banquo's name in all of this. Prithee, how gets he to the throne?'

That was the tricky bit; Severus knew that.

Chapter Three

Chapter 3 of 6

Severus finds his mind wandering as Merlin comes to his own conclusions.

Author's notes: Any direct quotes from William Shakespeare's play "Macbeth" are in double quotation marks.

Severus marshalled his thoughts before he answered Merlin; it would not do to let the old man lead him along the path to any more admissions than he wanted to make at that time, or to state as facts what were really just speculations on his part. He pushed away thoughts of the over optimism and the way he had allowed himself to be distracted at Camelot; this time would be different. This time Severus had a plan on which he would focus; this time he would not let lush ripe women's bodies lead him astray, he thought, as he found his eyes had rested on Minerva's generous arse as she bent over the fire.

He had studied the signs, and Minerva had cast her rune stones, and even now Bella was brewing her hell broth. Luna had watched the moon's aureole for the last eight cycles; tomorrow would be the ninth full moon, the Hunter's moon. Severus sighed to himself, thinking of her other lover, her familiar, the bridge between beloved Luna and her namesake, the moon. He hoped he could get away from Merlin tomorrow to secure the wolfman; it would serve nothing for him to roam this blasted heath in search of prey, not the ultimate hunter under the Hunter's moon. One never knew what unwary traveller would cross the haunted heather once darkness fell. That aside, Merlin thought the wolfman perished, along with the man born not of woman, and the Black Grim. He sighed to himself again, this time in pleasure, suitably distracted once more from the things he should have been worrying about, instead thinking how many wounded troubled souls had come to him for succour after the collapse of their world, and of how they had sought him out. His little world of the lost and helpless, how he had nursed them all back to their rightful glory, and how they all looked to him as their saviour, and how his brides had nightly rewarded him with their women's charms.

Severus dragged his mind back from where it had threatened to wander to the delights of the flesh, where it was most at home. 'Many things have to happen first, Merlin,' he said, lacing his voice with as much mystery as he thought he could get away with. 'The signs will not be hurried; they march to their own drumbeat, not ours.'

'Humph,' Merlin grunted, as though Snape were stealing lines rightfully his.

'What my Mage Lord says is true, Lord Merlin,' Minerva remarked somewhat sternly, casting her rune stones yet again to where they clacked together on the dusty floor of the cavern, before coming to rest. She pointed a slim finger to where they lay. 'See there?' She indicated the stone nearest the fire. 'The king... see how the tree lies atop him and also atop the hill.' She looked up at the old wizard. 'Macbeth may take the crown, Lord Merlin, but the movement of trees will herald his fate.' She snatched the stones up and let them click into the pocket of her gown, giving Severus a long troubled look.

Merlin nodded, and Severus wondered what else Minerva had seen, if it had been something that satisfied the old man, if there were some message that Snape had missed, but that both Merlin and Minerva had understood. He had always believed the reading of the runes to be a somewhat woolly art, but thought it odd how Minerva had cast that same message nine times now: a king, a tree, a hill, and yet had never seemed troubled before. She would cast it no more; nine was perfection.

He watched his fiery Minerva as she turned to him: wise woman, witch, wanton. Perhaps he should lie with her tonight instead. Whoever he lay with, Severus hoped it would be soon; already his balls were beginning to ache at the thought, and his cock would need little ministration to give forth its first load of creamy glory. He found, much to his consternation, that he had turned from Minerva and was holding the Fey's eyes, as his mind still meandered down the tunnels of love of his own beautiful witches. He had an uneasy feeling that she too was thinking of love, of spreading her thighs for a younger man than the ancient she had come north with, for a man who would have no need of the levitating charm she probably had to cast on Merlin's mouldering old prick, and he remembered the hot pulsing warmth of her cunt, and the way it would suck at his cock with more expertise than the mouths of the finest courtesans of Paris.

'What knowest thee of this Macbeth, Severus?' Merlin asked, breaking into Snape's rather pleasant reverie. 'The king's favourite, is he not?'

The Fey looked away, and Snape shrugged, noticing Minerva and Luna and Bellatrix whispering together as though they too had noticed Morgaine's scantily veiled attentions. 'A fighting man, brave and decked in glory,' he replied, wondering how he would head off trouble if he allowed himself to succumb to the Fey's obvious invitations. 'Duncan's favourite indeed.'

'And yet a sodomite, Severus, if what the moon child sayeth is truth,' Merlin murmured his doubt. 'Unusual a general useth his arse as a quim for the men he commandeth.'

'Luna cannot be false,' Severus lied glibly himself, not really caring if Macbeth got buggered senseless by anyone, as long as it wasn't him. In truth, having trusted most of that to Narcissa the Black, Snape knew little about Macbeth, save for the fact that he had fought in foreign parts for years, and had a legitimate claim to Scotland's throne, albeit twice or thrice removed. He had arrived back in his family home of Inverness Castle three years before, around the same time Severus had arrived on this godforsaken heath he called home. After a little careful manoeuvring by Severus and Minerva, Macbeth had courted Narcissa the Black. Despite her assertions that she had used no such thing, Severus knew Narcissa had cast ensnaring charms to aid her task, just to make sure neither Macbeth's eyes, nor his hands, nor indeed his cock wandered to the wenches and slatterns in the castle, as seemed to have been their custom. After his marriage to Narcissa, Macbeth had left with Banquo once more to fight in the low countries of Europe for King Duncan. He had been back again in Inverness for a twelvemonth.

Severus didn't feel much like telling Merlin any of that though, and he was sure that Narcissa the Black was carefully monitoring the situation in Inverness. He sighed to himself; perhaps he should fly to Inverness once Merlin was asleep, and take Narcissa tonight, after all it would be shameful if her cunt really were to wither for want of service.

Severus wished he could shake the doubts from his mind though; there was so much, too much, not directly under his control. He would have ideally liked to be in Macbeth's confidence, instead of leaving so much under Narcissa's jurisdiction. In fact, he had been worming his way into Inverness Castle until recently, until Macbeth's last trip to the low lying lands, but now every time Severus went to the castle, Macbeth seemed to be absent, and Snape was becoming a little uneasy about that... that

coupled with Narcissa's growing discontent. Narcissa could be rather shrill if things weren't quite going her way.

Severus threw more herbs on the fire, drawing close so he could wreath himself in their fumes, and he had just got himself comfortably settled when Bella sat at his side. At first he thought she had leant in to whisper words of love, and shifted his position slightly to allow for fact that his cock had seemed to think so too, but Bella seemed distracted, casting glances across the fire to where Merlin drowsed, and the Fey sat quietly and thoughtfully at his side, a parody of the faithful chatelaine of his house that she pretended to be.

'Mage Lord,' Bella whispered. 'My kinsman comes tonight, remember, with an urgent message. Perhaps you and I should walk awhile upon the heath.' Her eyes promised him a pleasant tumble in the heather on the way back to ward off the chill.

Damn, Severus swore to himself; he had forgotten about that. It was warm in the cave now, and outside he could see the mist had fallen, and the night was already darker than the hour. He was loath to move, but it would not do for Merlin to know too much of the people he had about him. He dragged himself to his feet, watching the Fey as she looked across the fire in interest, only doused when Bella stood and took his arm.

'Whither goest thou, Severus?' Merlin asked.

'I have inhaled too deeply, Merlin,' he replied, nodding to where the purplish fumes still rose from the fire. 'I need air to clear my wits.' He cocked his head to the entrance of the cave, and Bella pulled up her shawl, all but hiding her raven hair.

Bella walked on as Severus stopped for a piss, watching absently as the steam rose from the heather to join the swirling mist. He frowned into the fog as he tucked his reluctant cock away and retied the laces on his breeches; he had lost sight of Bella. He moved on, almost losing his footing and nearly letting out a yelp of fright as an arm snaked around his waist, until he felt a hot tongue poke its way through his black hair, and into his ear.

'We have the time, Mage Lord,' Bella whispered throatily, her arm drawing him closer still, and her free hand dropping to where his cock had awakened again, ever hopeful of the release it had been longing for.

Severus shoved her to the ground, charming the springy heather below them dry and warm; he pulled the laces at her bodice and grappled with her kirtle, shoving it up to her waist to bury his face in her welcoming warmth. He raised his head at last from lapping her love, as she moaned and writhed beneath him, and he saw the mist had cleared a tiny bit, just enough to let the moon shine on Bella's bared white orbs, dusting them with ghostly whiteness. He dropped his face to her bosom, attaching his mouth first to one nipple, and then its neighbour, like a starving infant finding itself at the heavy breasts of a milk-engorged wet-nurse, as Bellatrix unfettered his cock at last, and it sprang free of his breeches, angry at its daylong imprisonment, yet longing for confinement of its own choosing.

It truly would not take long, Severus thought contentedly, as he sucked at her breasts, letting Bella guide his dripping prick to where her juices ran, grunting in base pleasure as he felt her greedy folds swallow him up. It was only a pity that it was just him and Bella; if one of his other women had come too, he would have had something to do with his hands.

He gasped as he felt Bella pull away, and a draught breathed about his cock, until she closed her mouth over him, slurping and licking, and at last engulfing him, as her hands deftly fondled his heavy balls. He found his own hands occupied after all, as his fingers raced up her milky white thighs to soak in her juice, and felt her squeeze her cunt around them. As he sensed the warmth of imminent climax wash over him, he drew his cock from her mouth and shoved her legs apart, drawing them up onto his shoulders to spread her like the wanton he loved, so the moonlight caught the glistening folds below the black curly thatch on her mound. He plunged into her, as unwilling as he was unable to wait any longer. He put a hand across her mouth, to silence her squeals of pleasure, as her walls pulsed around him; and as his balls drew up to spurt their heavy load into her quivering love, he pretended not to fantasise about the Fey.

Chapter Four

Chapter 4 of 6

Bella's kinsman gives Severus some serious food for thought.

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They had gone only fifty paces or so from their hurried coupling, when Severus heard the panting breath of an animal coming through the still foggy air. Bellatrix had stopped, and he could feel her casting her mind back to check it was indeed her kinsman, as if Snape could be so fortunate to meet up with another large black cur instead.

'You kept me waiting for long enough. Did you stop off for a fuck?' Sirius the Black snapped, as he materialised at their side, shaking himself from head to toe as though he were still a dog. 'By Merlin's tits, my balls are about to fall off.'

'May the gods be thanked for that much, and the maidens of Scotland preserved,' Snape replied. 'Speaking of Merlin's tits,' he said, 'the rest of him is here too.'

'Merlin? All of him?' the Black asked, as though perhaps just a few body parts had migrated north. 'The Fey too? Not the Fey, Severus... tell me that harpy is not here.'

'You tell him, Bella,' Snape said. 'You're a better liar than I am.'

'Hell's teeth, Severus,' the Black complained. 'What are they doing here?'

'Being difficult, at least Merlin is,' Snape replied. 'I am unsure of Morgaine's motives, thus far. Anyway,' he said testily, 'what was so grim a message that you had to see me tonight?'

'Well, I didn't know Merlin was here, did I?' the Black snapped back.

'Please get to the point, Black. I had plans for tonight that did not include walking across this last outpost on the road to hell.'

'Severus...' Sirius began, seeming to choose his words, and then changing his mind. 'What is Lucius de Mal Foi doing in Inverness Castle?'

'Who?' Snape pushed the word past the knot in his throat.

'Mal Foi... Lucius de Mal Foi. Narcissa isn't happy with you, Snape,' the Black went on. 'She had expected to be Queen of Scotland by now, with her lusty, victorious fighting-man of a husband at her side, and she's ended up in a draughty old castle, shackled to the man she thought she'd got rid of three hundred years ago.'

'Macbeth is Lucius de Mal Foi?' Snape asked. He'd stopped, barely noticing that he had begun to sink into a patch of bog, hardly even noticing that he had let his guard fall to the extent of letting someone else know that he didn't know half as much as he pretended to. He was catching up though, watching the fractured images in his mind coalesce into one horrible picture, understanding why Macbeth had been mysteriously absent of late whenever he had called at the castle.

'No, Lucius de Mal Foi is Lucius de Mal Foi,' the Black returned. 'Don't you have an idea of what is happening, Snape?'

'Yes... of course I do,' Severus replied, trying to get to grips with himself and the horrified thoughts running amok in his mind. 'I just had not expected Lucius to show himself so soon,' he lied; in truth he hadn't expected Lucius to turn up at all, after all, he had dropped from sight, if not memory, almost three hundred years beforehand. 'Has anyone else noticed?' he asked. 'Apart from Narcissa?' He pushed thoughts of Narcissa to one side; Narcissa being "not happy", as the Black had described it, wasn't something Severus felt equipped to deal with.

'I doubt it,' Sirius replied, giving him a shrewd look. 'He seems to have "lost" the real Macbeth somewhere along the line, possibly during his last trip to Europe, and taken his identity.'

'Does Banquo know?' Snape asked, just resisting the urge to ask if Banquo actually *were* his version of Banquo at all, and the complications that thought brought with it began to manifest themselves in his rather crowded mind.

Before the Black could reply, a breeze caused the mist to swirl for a moment, and Severus wondered if he had seen something just beyond them, just a darker shadow ducking below an outcrop of rock. He sent his mind to seek another presence, and could find none, just a soft black wall he knew was someone shielding their awareness from him, someone skilful, someone with the wiles of a woman. He wondered if Merlin had sent the Fey to spy on him, or if she were working to a scheme of her own.

The Black had shrugged in answer to his question, and Severus began to walk again, Bellatrix having furtively spelled his feet clear of the sucking morass. He raised his hand to his thin lips in a gesture of warning; it mattered little, the Black Grim was ever cautious, he knew as well as Snape that dangerous times called for careful measures. Snape satisfied himself that Morgaine would have heard nothing to interest her, but he hoped she had not seen the Black; she would have recognised either of his forms.

He had had time to compose his thoughts now, hating each one as much as the next. To appear to know everything would be folly, especially if that unknown to him should turn around and bite him on the arse. Yet, to back down to the Black, in any way, was unthinkable. He turned to Bellatrix, pouring promises of a another coupling, lewd beyond even her fertile imaginings, into her mind. He watched her part her lips as she let her little tongue run across them, wetting them with promises of other ever-moist lips ready to devour him again, and he had to drag his mind back to the problem on hand.

'Sirius,' Bella began, 'how has my sister not noticed Lucius before? She has, after all, lain with Macbeth the last three years and more, while he has been here at any rate, and yet only since his last return from France and the low countries, has she complained of him. In fact the lusty Macbeth had all but pinned her to the bed with his trusty dagger thrusts.'

'She does not seem to understand that herself, Bella,' the Black replied, as Severus walked slightly ahead of them, as though he had no interest in their family business. 'She told me he seemed to have changed, and yet she couldn't pinpoint what the change was, except for that fact that he no longer lies with her.'

'So, how do you know it is de Mal Foi?' she asked, keeping up with her Mage Lord's rapid enquiries. 'Not even Minerva sensed that earlier today, and she, above all of us, would have felt his magic.'

'I was at the castle two nights ago,' Sirius replied. 'I happened upon Macbeth in the corridors, and was surprised he seemed to recognise me. He covered his error by feigning wonder that anyone was abroad so late,' he went on. 'My curiosity piqued, of course, and I followed him in my other from to where he met with a young soldier of his guard.'

'And,' Bella enquired, needing no prompting from Severus now.

'The sweat of that particular doe when being rutted by a stag was, shall I say, familiar to me,' the Black said, his lip turning in a sneer of distaste. 'What I did not sense though was any magic.'

'Bound?' Bella asked. 'But by whom? Lucius was a fool, granted, but a powerful fool.'

'I could not tell, but I suspect that was why Narcissa failed to notice just who had replaced Macbeth.' The Black had stopped, and pulling his heavy cloak tight about him, he called softly to Severus's back. 'Was there anything else you wanted to know, Severus? Because I really ought to get back there to keep my eye on things. It would not do for our plans to go any further astray.'

Our plans, Snape thought sourly; he was willing to wager when the cat finally crawled out of this particular sack of rats that everyone would be happy to disown them, and they would very rapidly become *his* plans again. 'What of the Wolfman?' he asked, pretending he hadn't noticed the Black's insinuation, and resisting the urge to ask Sirius why he had seen fit to tell Narcissa just who her Macbeth had become.

'I've left him with James the Pot Peddler, but he is pining for Luna,' Sirius replied, as Snape's lip turned in disdain at the Pot Peddler's name. The Black let his eyes rise to where the fast waxing gibbous had begun to peep through the scattering mist. 'Will you send her to him?' he asked.

Snape wasn't sure; Luna longed for her Wolfman, he knew that, but it was safer, whilst Merlin was there at any rate, just to secure him in his own cave. He doubted Morgaine's sharp eyes would miss any wounds Luna might incur, even with Minerva's powerful charms to hide them.

Sirius didn't seem to expect an answer. He turned instead to the question that was troubling Snape more than the others. 'Why is Merlin here, Severus?'

'I am beginning to wonder that myself,' Snape admitted. 'I am beginning to wonder if the Fey convinced him to make the journey north, and if so, why?'

'Get rid of him, Severus,' Sirius replied. 'There are things going on at Inverness Castle that I don't like. I need you there, and Minerva too, they aren't things I can cope with.'

Snape frowned at the Black's unusual admission. 'What things? What else is happening?'

'Strangers hanging about the place. People who don't seem to be whom they purport to be,' the Black said, giving Snape an uneasy look, one that he didn't like at all. 'And I don't just mean Macbeth.'

'Who else?'

'A few peasants who don't seem to be Scotsmen, yet Inverness is far from the border, with slim pickings between it and the south,' Sirius replied. 'One in particular is a jester, who seems to keep Lucius entertained, although I've never heard him tell a joke, or seen Lucius laugh for that matter. Goes by the name of Thomas the Riddler.'

'Why should itinerant peasants concern us?' Snape asked, not at all sure he wanted to hear the answer, as something pulled at this mind. 'Or this jester?'

'Because he's a wizard,' Sirius replied. 'You might want to think about that while Bella's bouncing on your balls again on the way home.'

'Has he recognised you as a wizard?' Snape asked, ignoring the Black's inference that he had been indulging in a little voyeurism, as the small hairs rose on the back of his neck with the thrill of danger.

'No, but I have a feeling Lucius will have mentioned me.'

'Stay in your other form, Black,' Severus said, all thought of banter fled, to be replaced by concern for Narcissa and, he admitted reluctantly, the Black and the Pot Peddler, and any other of his rescued souls. Whatever had pulled at Snape's memory gave a sharp tug, demanding to be recognised; then it came to him, like a beacon fire on a foggy night. 'Do you remember Arthur's court jester?' he asked. 'The one who arrived just before the Sword of Godric the Great was lost to the Lake?'

'Yes.' Sirius nodded. 'His name was Thomas too, wasn't it. Thomas the Gaunt.'

'Yes, I believe it was,' Snape remarked. He turned to Bellatrix, who was standing demurely at his side. He raised his hand to her cheek, but all thoughts of fleshly pleasures had fled him as something cold writhed in his belly.

'Mage Lord?' she whispered, sensing his tension as she had sensed the shift in his mood the more her kinsman had spoken. 'Shall I send Minerva to you?'

Severus cast his mind around, but save for the three of them the heath was empty and still, the air thick with fog and expectancy. He nodded once.

'And what would you have me tell Merlin, should he ask?'

Severus thought for a moment. 'Tell him I happened across a woman of my acquaintance, and have gone to spend the night with her.'

'Seeing as you have no privacy in our own cave?' she asked, letting her fine black eyebrow arch. 'Shall I curse your name and your wayward cock to heaven and hell, and weep and rail, and beg my sister Minerva to bring you back?'

He nodded again, hoping once more that the Fey had not seen Sirius. 'Take your other form, Bella, my heart,' he said. 'And, Bella, my beloved, send Aricanthe too.' He watched her change to a raven and swoop into the filthy foggy air, before turning to where the Black Grim watched on.

Chapter Five

Chapter 5 of 6

Severus journeys to Inverness Castle and finds more than one old face in a new guise.

Author's notes: Any direct quotes from William Shakespeare's play "Macbeth" are in double quotation marks.

Severus sat on a stone dyke, with Minerva perched on his shoulder and Aricanthe on his lap. Somehow knowing the almost full moon was obscured by the fog, made the night seem even darker to him, as though the lunar glow had been stolen, and then thinking of the moon made him think of his sweet Luna, and how he still had to decide what he would do about the next night. The Hunter's Moon, such an important moon in the lunar calendar that it somehow seemed wrong to keep Luna away from her familiar on the night he communed most deeply with his ultimate mistress, the night he needed Luna most. Severus fondled Aricanthe's tattered ears, and she turned her head to hiss fondly at him, and sink her needle-like teeth into his finger.

'Would that everyone were as true as you, my lovely,' Snape murmured. 'Never changing, are you, my Aricanthe?' The cat gave him a long hostile look, but didn't move from his knee, her throat rattling with an odd mixture between a growl and a purr, almost like an old man snoring. Snape let his mind wander through his plan again, trying to work out how they were going to deal with the added complication of Lucius de Mal Foi. He wondered if Narcissa had told Banquo just who Macbeth actually was, then wondered if de Mal Foi had told the mystery Riddler who Narcissa was, or even if Lucius knew Narcissa was not indeed Lady Macbeth. He went back to wondering about Banquo, and if the boy's puzzled look, when he had been beside the cave with Macbeth, had meant that he had already realised Macbeth's true identity for himself, and was trying to convey as much to Severus; he must have known he was nearby, after all, when his brides were. Then Severus decided he had better get a few answers, instead of wasting time on useless speculation.

Damn de Mal Foi, Snape hissed to himself; it was a mess. He had already managed to divert Merlin's attention enough to pull the wool over his eyes about the boy's true identity; he didn't care for the notion that he might have to pull it back again, and admit he had the real Banquo and Fleance safely holed up in France under the watchful magical eye of Alastor the Moody. Severus sighed as his mind wandered of its own accord; his little tumble with Bella had whetted his appetite, and he felt his cock stir more in hope than expectation of being back in the warmth of the arms of his brides in time for the main course. He was just about to suggest to Minerva that she change form and perch herself on his cock instead of his shoulder, when she turned her head, his beautiful wise Minerva, as the night-sight of her unblinking owl's eyes caught the denser dark of the Grim's other form. Aricanthe stood up on Severus's lap, arching her back and digging her claws into his thighs, as she too sensed the cur.

'All clear,' the Black murmured. 'The castle is abed for the best part, and deeply in its cups for the rest.'

'And Lucius?' Snape asked, as Minerva wafted down from his shoulder to stand at his side, and he smelt her womanly warmth, and wondered if she too had been thinking about warding off the foggy chill.

'Narcissa hasn't told him she knows who he is, and she's been casting charms to keep her own identity secret from him... She's waiting to talk to you,' Sirius replied. 'As for the mighty Macbeth, or whatever you want to call him... he's drunk.'

'So, the more things change, the more they stay the same,' Snape murmured, wincing at the thought of meeting Narcissa. 'What of this jester?' he asked. He was uneasy about Thomas the Riddler, and felt there was something else that he ought to have remembered about him, something important that had evaded him thus far. He knew de Mal Foi's measure: his passion for glory, his inability to either handle it or earn it, his habit of accepting the glitter of power without seeing it for fool's gold, but this mystery Riddler was an unknown, perhaps an innocent, more likely a serpent in the grass.

'He isn't there,' the Black replied. 'Banquo is though. Narcissa's warned him to stay away from the Riddler, as she has done too,' he said, giving Minerva a look, as though to ask if she were aware of Macbeth's companion's true identity.

'And has Narcissa told Banquo exactly who he has been fighting alongside, for the glory of the king whose crown is so coveted by Macbeth?' Minerva asked, her ruby lips pursing with amusement, emphasising each name as though to let the Black know that she had seen fit to forget more than he would ever hope to learn in a lifetime.

'He seems to have a different version of the mighty Macbeth's deeds of valour than Macbeth has told the rest of Scotland,' the Black replied. 'It seems Banquo fought like the dragon he is, and did most of the bleeding, whilst the bold Macbeth spent a considerable amount of time washing the dust out of his hair.'

'The more things change...' Snape repeated. 'Anyway, let us not play with words, Black. Just answer Minerva's question.'

'Yes, Draco knows,' Sirius replied, giving Snape a hard look that he'd laced with petty triumph, 'and he's not very happy with you either, Severus.'

The castle was almost as dark inside as the surrounding moorland had been, with only one guttering wall sconce in each of the long stone corridors. Snape borrowed his familiar's form and followed the dog, and Aricanthe walked at his side, inside her own shadow, Minerva wafting above them, unseen in the high buttresses. They had almost reached the back of the castle when he heard voices, a voice, Severus corrected himself; someone was conducting a one-sided conversation. He didn't need to see Lucius de Mal Foi to know it was him; it was a habit de Mal Foi had developed centuries before, no one else really being of the predisposition to listen to what he had to say, consisting as it usually had done of overdone tripe.

As it happened, he was mistaken; two fighting men, Ross and Angus, stood just inside the half-open door of the room they had reached.

"We are sent to give thee from our royal master thanks," Angus murmured from where he stood at the door.

"And for an earnest of a greater honour, he bade me, from him, call thee thane of Cawdor," Ross added, as the man they supposed was Macbeth drew back in feigned surprise, and in the shadows outside the room Minerva smiled her superior smile at Severus's raised eyebrow, as Luna's prediction came true.

My, that was quick, Severus thought wryly to himself, wondering if Macbeth would be king too before he managed to stagger to whatever bed he frequented.

"What? Can the devil speak true?" an all-too-familiar voice, laced with amusement, said from behind Severus, and he turned to see the boy he had placed in Banquo's stead, smiling somewhat cynically.

Macbeth was speaking again inside the room, and Snape drew as close as he dared. It was too late now to waste the seconds that changing form might take, lest he miss anything he needed to hear, but Lucius seemed to be running true to his vanity.

"The thane of Cawdor lives: why do you dress me in borrowed robes?" he asked.

They listened as Ross and Angus told of the thane's treachery, and how he was all but condemned, and de Mal Foi preened visibly as he heard details of how much King Duncan was looking forward to coming to Inverness Castle two days thence to bestow the honour on Macbeth in person. Once or twice de Mal Foi raised his hand to his hair, Macbeth's wild ginger locks, and Snape could almost feel him longing for his own silver-blond to set off Scotland's crown. He had seen enough; de Mal Foi was clearly as insane, vain and delusional as he ever had been, and Snape only thanked the gods that he had at least been absent the last three hundred odd years. He had cocked his head to the others, and had just begun to move away when Aricanthe hissed in warning.

The Black shimmered into his dog form, and Minerva into her owl, and both moved to conceal themselves deeper in the shadows. Severus wrapped his arms around Draco, and the two of them slipped into Aricanthe, as she once again moved over into her shadow to give them room.

A man was walking down the corridor, dressed outlandishly in mismatched hose and breeches, and a green and yellow doublet, and a three-cornered hat with bells on it, which Severus absently noted moved with each step he took, but for all that were silent. Snape felt the raw power of the Riddler even from where he stood inside his familiar's lithe body. The man Severus had known as Thomas the Gaunt, from his days before the fall of Camelot, stopped before the doorway, as though sensing them in the way that Aricanthe had sensed him, but he moved on, unable to detect anything from the animal forms he could not see.

'Ah, Lord Macbeth, I apologise. I had thought to find you alone and in want of some company,' the Riddler said lightly, as he pushed the half-open door wide.

'These men are just leaving, Thomas,' Lucius replied. "Thanks for your pains," he murmured to Ross and Angus, as the cat slipped in the door before it closed behind the king's messengers.

He had left the Black outside; there was no help for that though. Serves him justly for being a huge lump of a cur, Severus snorted to himself, all brawn and precious little in the way of brains. He wasn't so happy that Minerva had remained outside the room too; though he was loath to ever admit as much, he relied often on Minerva's brutal logic, and her way of not allowing herself to be distracted by the beauty surrounding her. Then again, he mused, was she not one of the very beauties distracting him anyway? He pulled himself up short, before he succumbed to the urge to wander from reality through the moist pulsing tunnels of love instead. The Riddler was speaking, and Severus suspected it would do no good to miss a single word he said.

'Well, well, my Lord Macbeth, thane of Cawdor already,' the Riddler said dryly, and Snape fancied that de Mal Foi looked more concerned than pleased, and that this Riddler bowed to no man, instead expecting the worthy thane of Glamis and Cawdor to tug his ridiculous forelock to him.

"Glamis, and thane of Cawdor! The greatest is behind," de Mal Foi said somewhat cryptically, yet absently, as though he were talking to himself.

The Riddler had gone to the window, and had pulled the heavy drapes aside, and Severus suspected he did so not to see the dark foggy night beyond, but more to check whether he were being eavesdropped upon. 'Whilst we are alone, I would talk with you,' he said, looking about the sparsely finished chamber, opening iron-bound wooden chests to peer inside them. 'We are alone, are we not, thane of Glamis, and Cawdor too?' he asked, his voice a sneer, all pretence of deference dropped.

'Yes, yes, Thomas, we are alone,' Lucius replied.

'Tell me once more then, what said these crones you happened upon on the moor?' the Riddler asked. 'I would not care to find that the plans I have laid so carefully are to be thwarted by another.'

'They promised me the crown of Scotland,' Lucius replied. 'Is that not what you promised me too?'

'Fool,' Thomas the Riddler snapped. 'Do you think for one moment... no, no, I flatter you by suggesting thought is not above you... Do not imagine for one moment, Lucius, that I have plucked you from the brothels of Florence, where you were too submerged with your bum boys to even notice the years passing, for your reedy companion Banquo to take the ultimate prize.'

'I don't know what you mean,' Lucius replied, bristling, yet seeming wary of the other man. 'I shall be king. Banquo's sons may take the crown, but only after I pass from this world.'

'Which may be sooner than you think if I do not get a proper answer,' the Riddler replied. 'My interest in this crown is more long-term than its duration on your head. Now tell me where I can find these crones. I would hear for myself on what they base their prediction.'

Severus felt his heart skip in his chest; he had to somehow get out of that room. He had left his beloved Bella and his sweet Luna alone with Merlin and the Fey, with not even his wise Minerva to protect them.

The Riddler had crossed the room again, and to Severus's relief, he flung the door open. 'But first I would speak with this Banquo whose sons would snatch the throne from my grasp.'

'Your grasp?' de Mal Foi asked, emboldened as he saw his rightful prize misplaced. 'If I am to be king, the throne and the crown are mine too. I believe that is the way of things.'

The Riddler spun to him, and Severus could see that he too was wary, that he knew de Mal Foi for the acquisitive fool he undoubtedly was, and that, despite whatever sway the Riddler held over him, de Mal Foi would fight to hold on to what he had gained. 'Of course, Lucius,' he said, straightening de Mal Foi's ruffled feathers. 'I merely sought to warn you that enemies may lurk behind you, even hidden in the clothes of friends.'

"The instruments of darkness tell us truths, win us with honest trifles, to betray's in deepest consequence..." Draco's whispered words trailed off, from where Snape's arms were still wrapped around him in Aricanthe's body, as the Riddler marched from the room, leaving de Mal Foi looking after him, his face a confusing mixture of consternation and relief.

Severus had moved from the room too, leaving de Mal Foi to his mind's more inane ramblings. As the Riddler disappeared, he slipped out of Aricanthe; he had no time to waste, he had to get back to the moor and move his beloved ones to safety. As he turned to where Minerva and the Black were coming out the shadows, a thought struck him, the one that had been worrying him earlier; it hit him now like a bucket of cold night piss. Minerva and Black moved towards him, their faces taut with the concern his own look must have mirrored, but in his mind's eye Severus saw another man and woman, emerging from the shadows of the glorious castle of Camelot that had been King Arthur's home. The man had been Thomas the Gaunt, and the woman, Morgaine the Fey.

Chapter Six

Chapter 6 of 6

Severus finds the questions piling up, and the answers thin on the ground.

Author's notes: Any direct quotes from William Shakespeare's play "Macbeth" are in double quotation marks.

'The Fey?' Sirius asked, as both Minerva and Draco shared an uneasy look. 'How can you be sure, Severus? It was four hundred years ago.'

'I am hardly in my dotage yet,' Severus snapped back. 'And I do not recall questioning your own powers of observation when you named this Riddler as Thomas the Gaunt.'

'Mage Lord,' Minerva interrupted, before the spat became as silly as it was already useless. 'Are we to assume that the Fey and this Riddler are in contact with one another?' she asked. 'If so, we are all but undone.'

Snape closed his eyes briefly. It was enough that she had said as much in front of the Black as she had done, without further letting him know what indiscretions had passed between himself and Merlin in the cave, in the Fey's hearing. He had to get to Bella and Luna; he had to keep Draco safe, and with him Andromeda, and he had to ensure Narcissa's safety. Narcissa... he let his mind drift to the risks she had already taken for his plan: how she had taken the place of the Earl of Moray's daughter, as a woman of suitability high station to woo the real Macbeth, how she had isolated herself from her sisters for three long lonely years in Inverness Castle. And Lucius too, he thought with a groan; damn him to hellfire and back, now he even had to worry about damn Lucius de damn Mal Foi.

'Not yet, Minerva,' he said, his mind racing to formulate some sort of plan to keep his loved ones safe until he executed his master plan, and Duncan and Macbeth with it. Damn de Mal Foi again; if his head parted company with the rest of him, Severus decided he wasn't going to feel guilty about it.

He turned to the Black. However much he disliked him, Severus could not deny his trust in him. 'If I keep the Fey occupied until Minerva gets Luna and Bella to safety, can you make sure this Riddler goes nowhere near Narcissa?' he asked.

The Black nodded. 'What of Draco?' he asked, looking to where the boy stood at the wall with Aricanthe in his arms, something she never allowed Severus to do; she would sit in his lap, at her own behest, but that was all.

'He comes with me. I shall get Minerva to collect Andromeda too. The Riddler has mentioned Banquo, and if he finds he is not at Inverness Castle,' Snape said, nodding to where the ramparts loomed above them in the foggy night air, 'he may go looking for him. Aricanthe will keep them safe,' he added, looking to where his beloved familiar blinked back at him with fond hostility.

'I'm not living inside a cat,' Draco snapped, looking down to where Aricanthe looked back up at him.

'You will do my Mage Lord's bidding, my boy,' Minerva said, 'until he tells you it is safe to do otherwise. This seems no longer the game we played a few days back.'

'She's right,' the Black added, as even Aricanthe seemed to nod her agreement. Sirius looked to Snape. 'What plan have you got, Severus?' he asked. 'It had better be good. Preferably one that addresses what you are going to tell Merlin. He'll have to know your suspicions of the Fey.'

'If he has not his own already,' Minerva added.

'If he is not also in contact with this Riddler,' Severus added, voicing his deepest concern.

'That's a lot of if's, Snape,' the Black muttered.

'In lieu of answers, Black, it is best not to make assumptions that may turn around and bite our arses while bared and unaware,' Snape replied, giving him a hard look. In truth he wasn't sure whether to have doubts about just the Fey, or the Fey and Merlin too, or even just how many other plots were afoot. 'Whatever happens, I must move my beloved wenches to safety tonight. I can tarry no longer, Black. Go to Narcissa now, and let her know I have Draco and her sisters safely hidden, and that she must beware of the Riddler.'

'Where are you going to take them?' the Black asked, as Snape began to walk across the drawbridge.

Severus looked to the sky, a smile curling his otherwise mirthless mouth as the almost full moon slipped through a hole in the mist. 'To the Wolfman, of course. Tomorrow is the Hunter's Moon; mayhap I shall gift him some prey worthy even of him.'

The Black gave him a long troubled look. 'Don't get too inventive here, Severus,' he said. 'Remember what happened at Camelot.'

'That was four hundred years ago, Black.'

'I know,' Sirius agreed with a shudder. 'Maybe time will dull my wits and my memory, and the gods grant that I live long enough.'

Severus was hardly prepared for the relief he felt as he entered the cave and found Merlin and the Fey drowsing on one side of the smouldering ashes of the fire pit, and

Bellatrix and Luna talking quietly together at the other side.

'Mage Lord?' Bella said quietly, casting a quick glance to where the Fey had fully woken and watched them, with her eyes narrowed in suspicion, which she tried to feign as sleepiness. 'The wench turned you out before the dawn?' Bella went on, lacing her voice with humiliated indictment.

Severus felt her real questions, as Luna stood and kissed him, and he pulled her to him, as though his arms alone could protect from whatever evil lurked. He widened his eyes, first to Bella and then to where his sweet Luna clung to him, her breasts rubbing his side, reminding him of her wiles. 'Leave me, witches,' he snapped, as though weary of them, as he sensed the Fey's interest pique behind him. 'I am tired.'

They both pouted and grumbled, and cast him accusing looks, but he knew they understood he wanted them to leave the cave, and soon they would understand if he absolutely had to take the Fey, it was for their safety that he did so. Quite content with his reasoning, he turned to where the Fey was watching Luna and Bella, too wrapped up in her own potential victory to feel the suspicions she should have felt. She turned to hold Snape's eyes, and her look became speculative.

'The old man sleeps soundly,' Morgaine said quietly, once she had listened to the muttering voices of her old adversaries disappearing into the foggy night.

Snape had already shrugged off his warm cloak, and made to huddle into his blankets. 'The rest of the righteous,' he replied, watching her across the fire pit.

'I sometimes fear I disturb him with my restlessness,' she said, letting her pink tongue run slowly the full circumference of her cherry lips, as Severus imagined it running the length of his cock, and his cock reminded him that it might be no bad idea to turn imagination into reality.

'Perhaps, my Fey Lady Morgaine,' he said, emphasising the word "lady", in a way that made it clear that he thought her no such thing, and would have thought the less of her if he had. 'Mayhap it would be better for all concerned if you were to come to this side of the fire.'

She looked once to Merlin, but he had just snorted fitfully as she stood, his sleep only slightly disturbed. Severus knew full well the ancient one could be wide awake, but didn't care much; he was fulfilling his duty to his loved ones, or so he told himself, and Merlin's wrath would be nothing to their safety.

'Well, Severus, is even now your cock aloft?' Morgaine said throatily, repeating the first words she had said to him when she had arrived on the heath. She dropped her hand to his breeches, without waiting for an answer, her little pink tongue circling her lips again, in a way that made Severus's breath shorten.

It would be unwise to make her wait, he decided, just in case Merlin did wake. He would make short work of this, just long enough to let Minerva get Luna and Bella away, conveniently forgetting that they were already long gone.

He pushed her back from him and drew her bodice down to expose her breasts, nipping each of her fat puckered nipples with his teeth, as they stood out in invitation. It had been too long since he had tasted her flesh, he thought, as his mouth swept down her belly, and his hands fumbled expertly with her kirtle, shoving it aside to expose her gleaming white thighs and her curly thatch. Morgaine spread her legs wide, like the whore she was, and pulled Severus to her, one hand deftly unlacing his breeches, as the other kneaded his cock.

He groaned as she freed him, feeling the heavy ache in his balls remind him what the point of all this prolonged foreplay was. He dipped his fingers to her warmth, coating them in her juices, and then slicking his already drooling prick where it stood like a rigid reminder of what was to come. He watched for just a moment as she licked at the thin clear rope of his leakage, where it dripped steadily between them, before shoving her back and slamming into her. All in the course of protecting my beloved ones, he told himself. As her folds grasped his cock to suck his thick creamy man seed from him in a hot angry rush, he felt a tiny warning push at his mind, the mind he had closed down as carefully as the Fey had closed hers. He wondered if it came from the woman below him, or the old man across the fire, the one he now knew was wide awake, or from somewhere quite different.

Severus lay awake all night and well into the dawn, until he was sure that the Fey had finally succumbed to sleep. He stood carefully, not summoning his heavy cloak until he got to the mouth of the cave, for fear of waking either Merlin or the Fey. He wanted to be away from here now, not caring to admit to himself how exposed he felt in the face of unknown danger without even Aricanthe at his side.

As he turned to leave the cave, Merlin cracked one bleary eye open. 'I am wroth with thee, Severus,' he said. 'Seek not to hide from me that which cannot be hidden.'

Snape let his eyes slide to where the Fey slept, knowing full well that Merlin's anger had nothing to do with their coupling, that such trifles were far below the weightier matters with which he saw fit to concern himself.

'Makest thou now in haste, Severus,' Merlin said. 'Mayhap eld maketh me a lesser buck to ride this doe, but I would acquaint thee that I know her bounteous bosom heaveth with desire and malice, both in equal part.'

'You sent her to spy on me, while I walked the moor with Bella,' Snape murmured in reply, yet somehow relieved that he would not have to tell Merlin he suspected Morgaine of treachery.

'Not I, Severus,' the old man replied. 'Nor did she leave this cavern alone.' He turned to the entrance of the cave, and as he did he allowed Snape, for just a moment, to plumb the vast depths of his mind, to find mischief and greed and scheming aplenty, yet of guile in the matter of the Fey, there was none. 'Make haste,' Merlin repeated seeming satisfied that Severus would trust him. 'We shall talk anon, and at greater length. "Light thickens, and the crows make wing to th'rooky wood", he said. 'Tarry not, lest "night's black agents to their preys do rouse".'

Snape gave the old wizard a long look, before ducking out of the cave. He had forgotten to ask Minerva if the Fey had left the cave when he had walked with Bella, and he found he was unsure if he were less or more troubled than he had been. He went to the burn, about fifty paces or so from the cave, and splashed the freezing peaty water on his face, before turning to the bushes to take a long satisfying piss against them.

His first stop was the Wolfman's cave. Lupin was already building up his fire, Luna at his side, talking quietly to him. Snape knew they would want to take advantage of as much of this day as they could, as though in some way that could make up for the cruel night ahead of them.

He didn't intend to stay long with the Wolfman, just long enough to check his brides were safe, and that Andromeda was with them. Though he would have been content to blame James the Pot Peddler's presence for hastening him on his way, it was really Draco's information that the Black had called an hour before dawn, to say that Macbeth had been summoned the few short leagues to Forres Castle, to see the king, and that he had already left Inverness Castle to go there.

Severus hoped he had gone alone, and not with the Riddler at his side. He could well do without Duncan dying before the appointed time, and anything else that could possibly go wrong, and given his track record, very probably would.

He dropped to his haunches between Luna and the Wolfman. 'I shall be back soon,' he said, glancing to the sky, as though he could even now see the Hunter's Moon rise in the early morning mist. 'Long before she calls you.' He laid his hand on the Wolfman's shoulder, feeling his helplessness, as he always did.

'Sirius said you might have a task for me,' Remus said, his gold-flecked eyes troubled.

Severus looked to where James had lifted his head from his blankets, and was watching them warily. He sensed the Pot Peddler's usual antagonism, but this was no time for centuries old petty rivalries to raise their heads. He needed them all tonight; he knew that. 'James and Sirius will be with you, Wolf,' he said. 'I need you tonight though, you and my beloved Luna.' He looked again to James, and thought his hostility had dropped a little at his name being mentioned. 'I'll be back from Inverness as quickly as I can, but I must meet with Narcissa. It serves us not to have any one of us cast adrift in this storm that seems to be gathering.'

'Who else is coming?' James asked, now seeming content to include himself, now that Snape had done the hard work. 'Shall I call the Weasel Catchers?'

'Not just yet,' Snape replied. 'But I shall need them soon, for something quite different.'

With that, he stood and wrapped his heavy cloak about him, disappearing into the morning mist, leaving just a space where he had been.
