

# For Young Severus Is There

*by Owlbait*

When dealing with the Fey it is best to keep your bargains. A Snapeish telling of the Tam Lin tale.

## The End of the War

*Chapter 1 of 2*

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A dozen or more sudden loud *cracks* broke the silence of the old manor as Voldemort's Death Eaters obeyed his summons. When all were arrayed in their expected places, the Dark Lord revealed his plans and assigned to each their tasks.

"It is time we brought the magical creatures of the world to our side. The part humans and the creatures of darkness...Wizards kind has not treated them well; they will ally themselves with us."

A chorus of "Yes, my Lord" and "Brilliant, my Lord," followed this pronouncement.

"You will go in pairs. If one should fall, I want the other to return and bring me word."

Less enthusiasm was shown as the Dark Lord named individuals to seek out the various tribes of Dark creatures and treat with them.

"Mulciber and Avery, you are to go to the Hags."

"Yes, my Lord," the two replied gratefully. There were far worse assignments coming.

"Travers and Nott, you will meet with Fenrir Greyback. If he agrees, then all the werewolves will follow."

Travers and Nott shuddered and bowed, accepting wordlessly. The others breathed a great sigh at escaping this particular job.

"McNair and Crabbe, I want you to go to the Giants. Move quickly and bring gifts. I believe Dumbledore will attempt to treat with them as well. Be certain you win. Am I understood?"

"Yes, my Lord," Crabbe answered.

"Perfectly," said McNair.

"Malfoy and Snape." The two men stood a bit straighter and looked up at the Dark Lord, waiting silently. "You will go to the Unseelie Court and treat with the Faerie Queen. Go now, it is nearly Midsummer. If you miss your chance, you won't be able to get through until Halloween when Severus would be missed at Hogwarts.

"Yes, my Lord," Lucius and Severus both answered and prepared to follow their orders immediately upon being dismissed.

There were several more assignments. Lord Voldemort himself took the task of meeting with the Dementors, for which his followers were all deeply grateful.

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Lucius and Severus were not able to report success at Midsummer. The Queen allowed their visit and directed her court to entertain them with food and dancing, but she was not willing to speak of war during the Midsummer feast. She directed them to return at Samhain, a more proper season for such discussion. Severus bowed and told her Lucius must represent them both, as he would have duties he could not escape. She nodded and agreed that Lucius would be expected then. The Queen invited them to spend the night before returning, but mindful of the old tales, they bowed respectfully and departed as swiftly as courtesy allowed.

Two weeks after All Souls, Lucius finally returned to the Dark Lord to report his successful meeting with the Queen. Lucius went to his master as quickly as possible to defer his wrath, not waiting for the next convocation, and spoke to him alone.

"Are you not fond enough of me to tear yourself away promptly, Lucius? Do not think you can hide from me in Faerie," was Voldemort's testy welcome.

"My Lord!" I only stayed the night, as the Queen bade me. I could not be so rude as to refuse and risk her denying your request."

Voldemort stared into Lucius's panicked blue eyes and saw the truth of his words.

"Ah, yes. Time runs differently there; I had forgotten. You are forgiven your tardiness, Lucius. Tell me, what does she offer, and what is her price?"

"She offers five companies of elven archers, my Lord, for one battle, whenever you should call for them. She gave me this ring to bring to you." Lucius knelt before the Dark Lord and held out a small silver ring with a green stone. "Place it on your finger to indicate you accept her offer, and turn it thrice about when you wish to summon her aid."

Voldemort took the ring and admired it. "Very good, Lucius. And, the price?"

"She ... she wants Severus, my Lord."

"You did not agree, did you? I need him where he is. He is valuable as my spy, and I am pleased that he has kept his place all these years waiting for my return."

Lucius cowered and hastened to explain, "I told her that you would not agree, my Lord. She said that she would not claim her price until you summoned her aid. When you come to that pass, she said, all will be disclosed and you should have no further need of your spy. I promised only that I would bring you the ring and her words. If you place the ring on your finger, she will be aware of it and the bargain will be sealed."

Lucius dared to look up briefly to gauge his master's reaction. The snarl had eased; he breathed again.

"Excellent work, Lucius. Better than I had expected. You have pleased me," Voldemort told his kneeling minion, and he placed the ring on his littlest finger.

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The day the Dark Lord had been working towards for the last two years was fast approaching, but before he was quite ready, he became aware of something terrible, and cold dread seized him. He raced about Wizarding Britain seeking his Horcruxes to verify their safety. In each place, he found he was too late. Bringing Nagini to him, he knew he could not wait; it was time to go to Hogwarts, the battle must begin.

Severus flew to meet him on the way and reported that Potter was at Hogwarts, or so he believed. There was no time to lose. Voldemort summoned all his Death Eaters and bade them to bring the armies of all the creatures they had promised him. Severus bowed and watched the Dark Lord twist a small ring about his finger as Severus asked what were his orders.

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Outside the Shrieking Shack, the battle raged. Voldemort had the edge in number of forces, and many of the defenders were mere children, but without mastery of the Elder Wand, he still feared defeat. It was ... regrettable, but there was only one thing to do.

As Severus lay dying, Voldemort retrieved his snake. There was no time to lose waiting for the inevitable. Voldemort hurried down the passageway. By the time he reached Potter, Severus would be dead and full mastery of the wand would be his.

Harry emerged from his cloak and knelt by Severus Snape's side, taking his professor's last lesson for him into Hermione's glass phials. When he had them safe, the three also left.

As the footsteps of the children disappeared in the distance down the tunnel, the air inside the shack shimmered and the Queen appeared with two of her attendants. The Queen knelt at Severus's side, heedless of the blood, which did not stain her clothes. She held his hand and touched his face, gazing into his sightless eyes.

"He still lives, but not for much longer." She stood. "Do what you can for him, quickly, or it will be too late," she told the first attendant who immediately knelt in her place. To the other she said, "Summon back my troops; Riddle forfeited my aid when he tried to renege on my price. Go." The elf bowed and vanished.

Meanwhile, the first elf tipped a few drops of liquid from a tiny flask onto Severus's neck, and a few more between his lips. The elf then lay both hands on Severus's chest and, eyes closed, began to sing softly in the elven tongue. There was a bluish glow, then Severus began to breathe, very faintly. "He will live, my Queen."

"Good. Bring him back to the Hill. Lay him to rest in my chamber, and see that he is cared for."

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Severus opened his eyes to find himself in a stone chamber that looked as if it were part of a natural cave, but with carpet and hangings and vases of flowers and bowls of fruit. All in all, it had the effect of a forest clearing at the richest height of summer.

*This is nice. Beautiful, even. I can't possibly be dead, then,* Severus thought to himself and tried to sit up. He was still very weak and didn't quite make it, but he did attract the attention of a young girl. Elf, he corrected himself, catching sight of her ears.

"Thou art awake. I must tell the Queen directly. Is there anything else thou wishest before I go?"

Severus thought a minute. He was neither in pain, nor hungry. He didn't even need to use the loo. "Where am I?"

"Thou art in the bedchamber of my Lady, the Queen of Faeries, Severus," she told him with a smile *Ah, well then, I suppose that means they mean me no harm. Yet...*

"Which Queen, if I may ask. I understand there is more than one Court."

"Ah, they said you were wise. Mortals call our folk the Unseelie Court," she told him.

*Oh. Shit.*

By the time the Queen came to him, Severus was feeling strong enough to sit up. She sat on the edge of the bed and took his hand possessively, pushing his hair back from his face with the other hand and gazing at him intently.

"Thank you for saving me, my Lady," Severus said, then licked his lips, unsure if he was allowed to ask questions.

"You are welcome, although you should realize I am serving my own interests."

"How so, madam?"

"Did you not know my price to your Lord for my aid?"

Severus felt a sinking feeling in his stomach. "He did not tell me."

It was no great surprise to him when she answered, "It was you. I realize this might anger you, but you should consider yourself fortunate. I was infuriated that Riddle tried to renege on our deal. If he wanted you dead, then I want you to live. I hope it wrecked his plan."

Severus bowed his head, and his hair swung forward. "He did not correctly understand the circumstances. My death ... had no value to him," he told her softly, his face hidden.

"Pity. Well, never mind that now. You are safe here in Faerie. Nothing shall harm you, and there will be only pleasure. Come," she said, standing and holding her hand to him.

Severus started to stand, but stopped when he realized he was naked under the sheets.

"Are you blushing?" the Queen asked, laughing. "Foolish mortal. Stand and let me admire my prize fully."

Red practically to the navel, Severus submitted to the Queen's imperious tone. He pushed back the blankets and stood before her, naked as the day he was born.

The Queen surveyed him with a wicked gleam in her eye. Despite his embarrassment, or perhaps because of it, Severus felt his cock twitch and reddened even more, staring down at the floor. He felt the Queen's hand slide down his back to curve under his bum and felt her lips at his shoulder.

"Too thin, I think, and I doubt you were ever beautiful, but I like the look of you just the same. Your hair looks practically elven, and your nose reminds me of an old lover, who pleased me greatly. You'll fatten up quickly, and your youth will return to you." Severus looked at her sharply. "Oh yes, mortals age ... differently here. You'll see," she said with a smile.

"Ella," she said sharply, clapping her hands. The young elf who had been there when Severus first woke reappeared. She smiled to see him standing there naked and at half mast, before curtsying to her Queen. "How may I serve?"

"Bring a robe for Severus here, so he can be more comfortable, and shoes as well." She turned to Severus. "I shall show you my domain." The elf, Ella, returned in mere moments with a silver-grey linen robe and low boots of the softest charcoal leather. He looked around, but there were no underthings. Not surprising the elves should be traditionalists, he supposed.

The tour did not take long. Severus learned that they were under the Faerie Hill, deep in the Forbidden Forest. At least, sometimes they were. The Queen explained that they were in the Faerie country, which looked very much like the mortal world, but without the artifacts of mortal hands. There was no Hogsmeade or Hogwarts. There were other hills and other kingdoms.

"If you came to the Faerie Hill from the mortal side, and were somehow able to tunnel straight into it, you would find nothing but dirt and rock, unless you happened to do your digging near one of the sun or fire feasts. Then the worlds are nearer and it is possible to break through. Ah, but you knew that ... you and your pretty friend came to me at Midsummer."

Severus saw the music room and the library, the weaving room where nimble-fingered elves made their cloth so strong and warm, yet so thin and light. Fabric which caught the shadows and bound them round the wearer. He saw the stable where the elf-steeds were kept for whenever the court should wish to ride. Finally, they came to the great hall, and Severus gasped. The ceiling of the cavern was charmed to show the sky, just like at Hogwarts. Severus suspected at least one of the founders had visited here and copied it. What drew his gasp, however, was how different it was. Night had fallen, but there was no moon, only stars -- but though Severus knew the skies over Hogwarts in every day of every season, these stars were utterly strange to him. He searched for the Dipper, and Polaris in vain. Even the Milky Way, which should have spilled bright and creamy across the ceiling on a moonless night such as this, was nowhere to be found. He felt sick. He may not be dead, but he might as well be. He had left the mortal world for good. Was there a single soul there who would mourn him? Certainly no one would wonder where his body had gone. No one would look; no one would try to bring him back. He was here forever.

The Queen seemed to sense the direction of his thoughts. "Do not grieve, my pet. You are here with me, and you will know only pleasure from now on." She slipped close, so close he could feel her feather-soft hair against his cheek. She pulled him into her arms and stroked his back when she felt him stiffen. *No*, he thought. *Lily wouldn't want this.*

The Queen continued to stroke and kiss him, unmindful of his silent resistance. She pressed herself against his body, and he felt his body's reflex to her nearness. Her perfume was nothing like a human woman would choose to wear. It reminded him of the deepest part of the Forbidden Forest of dark leaves and bright mushrooms and the tiny white flowers that grow in the shadows where the littlest insects sip from them.

*Lily isn't here ... she's dead, and I can't even join her there. Even now, with my task finally done, I won't ever be free.* Severus sat back on the bed behind him and looked up at the Queen. She slipped out of her gown and reached for him. Severus touched her skin, her breasts. She slid his robe up above his hips and bent to kiss his stomach and thighs, and finally took his warm cock into her mouth. At the feel of her, he let out a ragged breath and gave himself up to his new fate.

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**A/N:** Written for the 2011 round of Samhain Smut on LJ.

Big smooches for Luvsev, who is a talented beta and all around lovely person, and to Rose of the West who puts up with my flailing and wibbling like a trooper.

## If You Would Your True Love Win

*Chapter 2 of 2*

When dealing with the Fey it is best to keep your bargains. A Snapeish telling of the Tam Lin tale.

Months, then years, passed as best as Severus could tell in that timeless land, and the Queen's promise held. Severus knew nothing but pleasure. Food was plentiful and delicately flavored, elf-made wine flowed like water but never gave headaches. Severus was never allowed out of the Hill unaccompanied, but he might go as often as he liked with an escort to walk in the wilderness, or swim naked in the untamed forest streams, or ride elf steeds under the unknown stars.

There seemed to be no marriages among the elves, nor even jealousy. When the Queen did not claim him for her bed, any of the other elves of her court might invite him

to lie with them. As a novelty, there was quite a bit of vying for his attentions, sometimes two or more would come to him at once when they could not agree amongst themselves who should be first.

The human world slipped further and further from Severus's mind. In time he nearly forgot his past life and how he had come to that wonderful country.

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From time to time, another mortal man would be brought to the Queen's court to be feasted and feted and loved, just as Severus was. Severus thought sometimes to ask them for news of the human world, but their minds would be so full of the wonders before them that they remembered little about their previous lives, and cared less.

The strange stars, so frequently overcast, were little help to Severus in keeping track of the seasons and the years, but the four great feasts were always observed. The mortal world was close by on those nights; the entire hill thrummed with excitement.

On All Hallow's night, the Faerie Court rode out, arrayed in their finest robes. The young man Severus had lately befriended went with them. He bade Severus good night before they rode out and promised to meet him at the lake on the morrow to swim.

Severus never saw him again. No one would tell him what happened, nor mention his name.

Months, or was it years, later, when Severus had nearly forgotten, it happened again. Then, a third time. It was all Severus could do to recall the faces, let alone the names, of the previous guests of the Queen. He knew it was the magic of the country making him forget ... there was something important, but he couldn't seem to grasp it for more than a few moments before the music or games would draw his attention away.

Soon after the third disappearance, Severus teased a few words from one of the younger elven handmaidens. She whispered to him that the Queen owed a tithe to Hell, a tiende, every seven years. No enticement could persuade her to say more about it.

The Queen had told him truly, that he would grow younger here. Looking into the forest pools, he saw the lines of care had gone from his skin, and many of his scars had healed. The Dark Mark was still on his arm, but he'd been so young when he got it. Would it too vanish, in time? How much younger could he get? Severus suspected that reversing puberty would remove the Queen's interest in him, and what then?

Severus knew he had to get away soon. The tiende would come due again, and there was no other mortal in the Faerie hill now.

Severus began to pay more attention to his surroundings and look for ways to slip away without his attendants. This was difficult; there was only the one great entrance to the hill, and only the elf magic could open and close it. He waited, and he watched.

Midsummer approached; he might be able to get away while the worlds were near.

He hid in the hall behind a great statue of a goblin and waited. When the court rode through to hunt, he slipped out before the stone gates crashed closed and dashed for the forest. He was allowed out when he wanted to ride or walk, but not near the feasts the danger of his escape was too great then.

Severus didn't really have a plan, but he hoped that if he made it through the Forest to the place where, in the mortal world, Hogwarts was, that he would still feel some kind of connection and perhaps be able to follow it back. The Forest wasn't as dangerous in the Faerie world as it was in his. He wore the Queen's gift, the elf stone, at his brow. Nothing here would dare harm him.

Two thirds of the way through, he stopped suddenly on hearing the sharp snapping of a twig. He drew the elven cloak around him and slipped silently towards the noise. What he saw stopped his breath in his throat.

A witch, wearing Gryffindor robes, with the most beautiful long red hair he'd seen in decades flowing down her back, stood holding a flower she'd just broken from the bush in front of her. She dropped it into her empty basket and was reaching for another when he spoke.

"Lily..."

She turned. Wide blue eyes stared at him in shock, and the spell was broken.

"How did you know my name?"

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Lily had been gathering the forest roses for Potions ingredients. She knew she wasn't supposed to be in the Forest alone, but she loved the silence and the solitude. And, with her father being the Headmaster, she felt a bit as if she owned the place. When she had sensed herself being watched, though, fear had suddenly coiled in her. She'd been about to bolt until she heard her name spoken with such longing, and in the sexiest voice she'd ever heard in her life.

Looking up, she saw a dark forest elf in the shadow of the clearing with coal black eyes that stared at her disturbingly. He stood elegantly tall, green-grey robes hanging from his shoulders, draping on the lean muscles of his arms and chest. A stone gleamed like starlight from a fillet across his brow. He knew her name. She was lost.

"I'm sorry, I thought you were someone else," the elf said.

She could hear the disappointment in his voice. Lily's stomach flipped and she felt ill.

*That's not how the stories are supposed to go* she thought, in sudden grief. *That's not how this one is going to go. Am I a Gryffindor, or not?*

She stepped closer to him, and closer still, while he remained poised between watching her and disappearing into the trees. She held out her hand and placed her fingers gently on his arm to see if he was real. "Are you sure I won't do instead?"

The elf started at her touch, then looked at her again, really seeing her this time, and he smiled. "Hello," he said, taking her by the hand.

Lily was never certain exactly how it came about from there. She'd never done anything of the kind before, not even with boys she'd known for years. Yet, here she let this complete stranger take her by the hand and lay her down on the forest floor. As he kissed her, she saw stars, where he touched her, there was flame. When he entered her aching wetness, at first there was pain, but also a sweetness, and a feeling of completion like she'd never imagined.

She stroked his raven hair while he caught his breath. When he sat up, she did too, and winced to see her own dishevelled appearance. Forest mould had stained her robes with dark streaks, and several of last winter's leaves clung to her hair. Oh, Merlin! she didn't even know his name. She turned to ask him when she saw him suddenly whip his head around and stare back into the forest.

"They're going to find me, I've got to go!" With that he jumped up and ran back into the woods. Lily raced to follow him, but she tripped over her robes, still half on and half off, and fell back onto the ground in a heap. *Great. Just great.*

Lily gave up hope of following him deeper into the forest. She had to get back to Hogwarts and she still didn't have but one of the damn roses she'd come for in the first place. Muttering to herself at her gullibility, she picked her basketful as quickly as she could, gave herself and her clothes a brisk cleaning charm, and ran back to the castle.

Luckily for her it was midsummer, so no classes were in session. Lily lived at the castle year-round as her father was the Headmaster. She went to her own room, then took a real bath in the Prefects' tub something she could get away with when school was out, no way would she have been made Prefect, let alone Head Girl. By the time she saw her father at dinner, her control was restored and she made a reasonable impression of her normal self.

She hoped she'd find her elf lord again. Hour after hour and week after week she searched the forest, but there was no sign of him, and eventually she gave up. She would have thought the whole thing was a dream that she had fallen asleep in the forest, perhaps under the influence of some rare plant, and hallucinated everything except for one important piece of evidence that it was real.

Two weeks after the mysterious encounter in the Forbidden Forest, clockwork Lily missed her period. Four weeks after that, school had started. Soon after that, she gave in and saw Madam Pomfrey about it.

"I'm sorry, Lily, you are definitely pregnant. You know I'm going to have to tell the Headmaster. Will you tell me who the father is, child?"

"I can't."

"Do you mean you won't, or you don't know?" Poppy didn't sound especially shocked at the idea. Lily was sure she'd seen it all.

"I just can't," was all Lily would say.

That was all she said to her father too, and to her mother. They tried asking, they tried pleading. They swore they wouldn't hex any of his bits off unless Lily wanted them to, but there wasn't anything she could tell them; they'd never believe her.

She didn't tell her friends she was even pregnant, but by October they were starting to guess.

By Halloween, Lily had lost all hope. She'd meant, at first, to keep the child. She thought she'd maybe find her elf after the baby was born, and he'd come back for her. As her waist thickened, and her breasts grew heavier, she became too frightened. She didn't believe he'd ever come back. She couldn't face being a single mother while her friends went about their carefree lives. She'd have done it with him, but not alone, never alone.

She made one more trip to the forest; she had ingredients to gather. She knew what she needed, and where they grew. She'd brew her potion this afternoon and take it before dinner. Everyone would be at the Halloween feast, no one would notice she was sick, then it would be all over.

Lily leaned by the edge of the stream, grubbing among the roots. She knew it was here somewhere. Suddenly a strong arm gripped her shoulder and pulled her violently around.

"What are you doing?" *It's him. What is he doing here, now, of all times? It's too late. He should have come sooner. He would have if he'd cared at all.* Lily told herself.

"It's none of your business what I'm doing," she told him, her voice rising into a hiss just like her mother's did when she was angry.

The black-haired head leaned over her basket. "Evening primrose, pennyroyal, and I daresay that was tansy you were digging for just now. I damn well think it is my business. You're going to kill my child, aren't you?" The coal black eyes bored into hers, daring her to deny the truth of it.

"Who the hell do you think you are?" Lily shouted, pushing him back from out of her face. "For that matter, who the hell are you, anyway? You just came out of nowhere, shagged me on the forest floor and ran off. I've searched for you for weeks. You never even told me your fucking name!"

He deflated a bit and answered her softly. "Severus. My name is Severus Snape."

Lily didn't think anything he could have said would have made her angrier. She raised an arm to slap him, but lowered it again. "Don't lie to me, damnit! If you don't want me to know your name, then don't tell me. Just don't lie, and don't expect me to think you give a damn that I'm pregnant."

"It's the truth, my name is Severus. Why do you think I'm lying?"

"Because Severus Snape died years before I was born. My father goes on and on all the time about how he was the bravest man he ever knew. If you were Snape, you'd be around sixty years old. Besides, everyone said he was ugly and you are ..."

"I'm what?"

"Beautiful," she said, then blushed. He was far from it, really, but somehow it was true.

Severus let out a soft sigh. "I've been living in the elf country, with the Faeries. It ... changes you."

Wonder overtook her anger. So very few returned from the elf country. "Can you tell me about it?"

"Will you think about keeping the baby? Please?"

"I'll think about it. I'm not promising."

"Come, sit," he told her and led her to a soft mossy spot by a tree they could lean against while they talked.

"You know my name, so I guess you've heard about what the Dark Lord did, when he was finished with me."

Lily nodded. "He killed you with the snake, but no one ever found your body."

"I wasn't yet dead. Very nearly, but not quite..."

Lily listened in silent awe, as Severus described how he'd been rescued by the Queen of Faeries, and how she'd kept him all these years. "What year is it, anyway?" he asked her, suddenly.

"It's 2026."

Severus looked shaken. "It doesn't seem that long to me, I can only count about four years, but it's been twenty eight."

"You still look too young to be you," she told him. You must have been nearly forty at the end of the last war, but you don't look much older than me. Twenty at the very most."

"How old are you ... Lily, you said your name was Lily?"

"Lily Luna Potter," she told him. "I'm nineteen. I've left school, of course, but my father's the Headmaster, and he said I can stay until I find a place of my own."

Severus had been staring at her during this speech. "Please. Please tell me you aren't Harry's daughter."

"Yes, he's my dad," she told him a little proudly. "My mum is Ginevra Weasley Potter."

Severus dropped his face into his hands. "Of course."

Lily laughed. "Okay, now I believe you are really Severus Snape."

He turned to look at her sideways through the curtains of his hair. "Thank you. I think."

"So you've been in the elf country nearly thirty years? What is it like? Why have they kept you? And why were you trying to escape now?"

Severus evaded the 'why did they keep you' part of the question. He was certain it wouldn't help his case any to let her know that the faeries had a bit of a thing for humans.

"Every year since I've been there I guess every seven years in your time the Queen has to pay a tiende, a tithe, to hell. There have been other mortal men living with the elves for a time, three all told. At Samhain, they disappear. This year there was no other mortal ... I think it's my turn." Lily took his hand and held it tightly while he continued.

"During the sun and fire feasts, the worlds are closer. It is sometimes possible to pass between them. I tried to escape at Midsummer ... that's when I found you in the forest. When I ran off ... I had heard some of the elves looking for me. I didn't want them to find you too ... and I didn't want them to know I was trying to escape. I ran back to the Hill, and pretended I'd just gone out to pick wildflowers for the Queen.

"I'm so sorry I left you," he told her earnestly, pressing her hand tightly, and looking straight into her eyes as he said it. "I couldn't get out again for two more days ... and then it was too late, I couldn't get back to your world before today."

Severus's hands shook so as he told his story, and his eyes stared at her so intently, imploring her to believe him. Lily couldn't doubt his story. Her heart turned over, and she forgave him for abandoning her as she thought he had. "It's ok, Sev, I believe you. I trust you."

Severus's eyes opened wide in shock; he pulled Lily into his arms and buried his face in her hair. She felt his shoulders shaking and stroked his back gently. "No one's called me that in years, Lily, and no one's said they trust me. Can you? Really?"

"I can, I do. Are you free now, can you come back with me?"

"I don't think so, they'll come for me, and they'll find me; they need me for their tiende. Lily ... when I go, there will be nothing left of me in the world except your baby. Is there any way I could persuade you to keep it?"

"Not without a father, Severus, I ... I just can't. Is there no way to free you?"

"There's a way, I think. But you've got to be very brave."

"Tell me."

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That night, Lily stole her father's invisibility cloak and snuck out of the castle. Over her arm she carried a basket with an extra cloak, her wand, and a bottle of holy water. She flipped the cloak over her shoulders and drew up the hood, then set off down the path to where the Forest road and the Hogsmeade road met, right near the lake.

Clouds scudded across the moon, alternately cloaking it in darkness, and allowing shafts of moonlight to touch the tops of the trees or glitter off the surface of the lake. Tendrils of mist rose from the lake, spreading eerie fingers across the path and curling about Lily's ankles.

It was nearly midnight when she got to the crossroad. Standing squarely at the center, Lily took the holy water and cast it in a circle around her. Then she slipped to the side of the road, still within the wet marks, and waited. She tried not to cast a time charm every thirty seconds, but she knew when twelve o'clock came. She drew the cloak more tightly around herself, shivering, and stared hard into the dark mist.

Suddenly she heard a jingle of harness and a soft clapping of hooves. Muffled by the fog, they must be very near for the sound to reach her, but she could still see nothing. They were nearly upon her when she finally saw the first horses riding along the road. Just as Severus had said she would, the Queen came first on a coal black steed, then her attendants on their brown horses. Finally, a figure cloaked and hooded on a milk white horse, with the bright elf stone on his brow. He stared straight ahead, not seeing Lily, but she knew him.

Just before the white horse passed, she sprang up and grabbed it by the bridle. The horse shied, and Severus fought to keep his seat. He still didn't seem to see Lily, and she wasn't sure what she could do. The others would come back for him in a moment, or the horse would pull free and he'd ride on.

Letting go the bridle with one hand, she reached up and took his bare hand in hers. It seemed as if a veil dropped from his eyes; he recognized her with a look of wonder and slipped down from the white horse and into her arms.

Lily had only a moment to hug him before she felt him change. He became impossibly thin and long. His skin became rough, then smooth and scaly. He almost slithered away before she seized him with her hands and held him close again. His head whipped around and Lily looked at the long fangs dripping venom in panic. He wouldn't hurt her, but the way he thrashed, he might poison her accidentally. Strengthening her resolve, she closed her eyes and held on tightly.

After a moment, the wild thrashing ceased, and the snake coiled gently around her. She felt the dry forked tongue graze her cheek and imagined she'd been kissed.

The quiet moment was broken when the snake began to transform. Uncoiling as his length shrank and girth thickened, legs sprouted, and the scales were replaced with fur. Where the snake had been, a lean greyhound struggled in Lily's grasp.

She held him as tightly as she'd held the snake, trying not to fear the hound's white teeth, or the claws on the four strong paws that scabbled at her in a wild bid for freedom. She laid her cheek to the fur of his shoulder and closed her eyes again, remembering how Severus had felt when he touched her.

The memory made her feel warm, despite the cold of the late Northern night and the damp mist all about her from the lake. She felt her skin flush with heat, remembering the feel of Severus's naked skin in the moment he had entered her.

The hound in her arms grew warm too, impossibly warm. Suddenly, Lily realized the heat wasn't coming just from within her. The greyhound was gone, and had been replaced with a piece of red hot iron. She gasped in fear and nearly let go, but recovered herself in time. If it was going to burn her, she'd be ash already. She held the iron close to her, the glow of it making her pale skin ruddy and sparks shine in her red hair, and waited for the next change.

The next change was the last. The heat of the iron cooled to blood temperature, and the glow went out. Hard metal became soft flesh and silky hair, and eyes that looked at her in wonder. Realizing that the man she now had her arms around was mother-naked, Lily pulled the green cloak she'd borrowed from her Slytherin brother from her basket and threw it over his shoulders to cover him.

Suddenly a cold wind blew round, whipping up both their cloaks and making the brush wave frantically and they heard a hard, cold voice spoke from the broom by the road's edge.

"If I'd known you would return, Severus, I'd have torn out your two black eyes before I let them look on me.

"Had I known your heart was not dead, I'd have taken it from your body and replaced it with one of stone.

"If I knew you would escape me, I'd have given you as my tiende long ere now, before you could run away!"

Severus and Lily stared wildly around, grues running up and down both their spines, but the voice of the Faerie Queen had faded and did not return.

When they were certain she and the elven company had gone, Severus took Lily's face in his hands and kissed her, then he pulled sideways into his arms so he could lay a hand on the slight swell of her belly. "You did it," he murmured in her ear. "You've freed me. Will you keep the child now? I promise, I'll be there for you and for the babe."

She turned to face him and with a tender smile, told him, "Yes."

"Before I hold you to that, I should warn you. I've been presumed dead for decades. I probably haven't got a pot to piss in. I'm not sure yet how I'm going to keep myself, let alone a wife and child."

"I've got a job," she told him, "and rooms in the Castle; you can stay here too until you find work, and we figure out where we want to live. Come up with me now," she said, taking his hand and leading him up the path. "Wait till Dad sees you're alive. He'll have kittens!"

Severus took a deep breath, and closed his eyes, gathering his resources. "Lily, you have no idea." Then, with a wicked grin, "All right, then, let's go see him."

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A/N: Very much thanks to luvsev, the most amazing beta who deserves more turnaround time than I give her, and Rose of the West, my cheerleader in chief, who keeps the wibbles at bay.