

The Spinner's Ends

by Tarpeia

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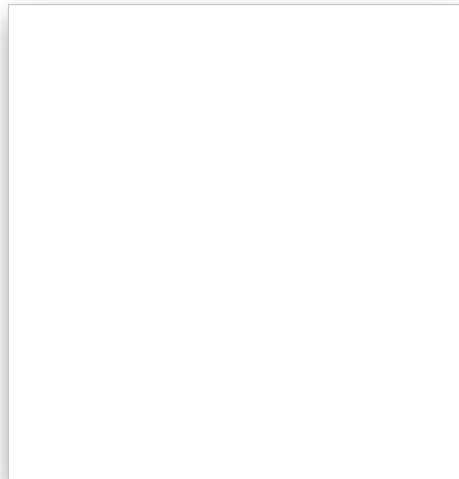
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Chapter 1 of 1

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Note: Although conceived as an independent story, *The Spinner's Ends* might as well be considered as a prequel to my darkfic, *The Redemption*. I would only have to add a few small adjustments to the first chapter of the latter (*At Malfoy Manor*) to make them entirely coherent.

I thank my wonderful beta, blue artemis, for her precious time and help.

Warning: This story contains non-con, mild violence and some very severe mindfuck. Also, my version of Snape is darker than canon. But as it refers to one of the darkest moments in his life (the time when he became a Death Eater), I believe it might be accurate in many ways.

A feeble light was glimmering behind the dark, slightly parted curtains, just as it had been the evening before. The gloomy street, dominated by the ominous shadow of the mill chimney, was mostly composed of old brick houses lined with a row of broken lanterns. The single illuminated window in this treeless alley looked warm and inviting. Yet there was something deceptive about its cheerful hospitality it was too reminiscent of an immense lamp designed to lure night insects.

Lily absently looked away. Turning the corner of Spinner's End, she stepped onto the riverbank, from where she caught sight of the peaceful current of water glistening in the moonshine. She eased her pace, feeling the gentle summer breeze, saturated with the fusty scent of the river, waft against her face and arms and blow strands of her auburn hair off her cheeks. For an instant, the calm of the night brought a string of memories of the classes she had attended at Hogwarts, of the long evenings she had spent on the Astronomy tower discovering planets and constellations.

Her parents' house was growing in the distance, all the windows dark. Mr. and Mrs. Evans had already gone to sleep, having decided not to wait for her to return from Kate's party. They were very understanding of her desire to see all of her old Muggle friends once again before she moved to James' house at Godric's Hollow, where the two of them would live together. Two weeks had passed since their graduation, and only one more was separating her from leaving her native Cokeworth forever.

Although the prospect of settling with James filled her with joy, it had stirred an unexpectedly strong wave of emotion in her heart. Determined not to waste a moment of the time she could spend in the Muggle world, she had chosen not to resort to magic in the course of those three weeks so that all her activities would keep their charm and authenticity. She helped her mother in her household chores combined with little walks and reading until it was time for her father to come home from work, and they would greet him with a freshly cooked meal. In the evening, she met one or several friends of hers for a cup of tea. In this fleeting, half-forgotten atmosphere of childhood, everything seemed more beautiful, even the quarter they lived in and which she had always disliked for its greyness and pollution. Now, she always walked her way home instead of Apparating... even if it meant she had to pass the lonely Spinner's End.

With a sad swallow, she entered the dark hall. A flow of cool air rose from the windows of the living room, waving the sheer curtains in a light draught. She ascended the stairs leading to the first floor, where her bedroom was situated. From her high window, she could contemplate the pale round face of the moon, which bathed the entire room in a pale golden light and made it look somewhat larger. Some of her old toys were still there, neatly arranged on a shelf, as were her children's books. Her parents had never had the heart to remove them, as they had told her, and she had decided to keep them intact as well. Someday, she hoped, she would give them to her own children.

She laid her handbag on the desk, taking a distracted look at her surroundings: the bookcase, the hastily covered bed, the bright Gryffindor banner. A deep, inexplicable urge to go to her sister's room and see her familiar furnishings, if only from the entry, overtook her. Silently, so she would not wake her parents, she walked to the adjacent door and opened it gently, switching on the light. Despite the fact that Petunia had not been living there for a year, her room was still impeccably tidy; the few things she had left behind were in a perfect order. There even seemed to be no dust on the furniture. Careful not to cross the doorstep she knew Petunia would not have wished her to enter, as Petunia became tense whenever someone, especially her younger sister, invaded her neatly organized space Lily leaned against the door frame, feeling nothing but regret.

Their last encounter, two days ago, had turned out far worse than she had feared. It had taken Mrs. Evans an hour-long phone argument to persuade Petunia to come and meet her sister before the latter moved away. Being busy arranging her new home at Little Winging had given the young Mrs Dursley a solid excuse as to why she could not join them. Her pride had not allowed her to mention the disastrous meeting that had taken place during the Christmas break, when James and Vernon had had a violent quarrel, for which she still had not forgiven Lily. But eventually, and with much reluctance, she had agreed to come for one day.

She had arrived in the late afternoon. In spite of the high temperature, she was wearing a formal skirt suit, her blonde hair curled impeccably, her nails painted an intense red. Her very bearing seemed to radiate the word *decent*. Lily could not help but suspect that she had dressed this way to teach her a lesson about how a respectable, elegant, *correct* young woman should look. Surprisingly enough, it had given her hope. If she convinced Petunia she sought and valued her advice, she would surely be able to soften her resentment.

During the family supper, Lily had driven the conversation away from her graduation to concentrate on her sister's new life, asking her about her plans with a sincere curiosity. Little by little, her affectionate attention had gotten the best of Petunia's reserve, and the invisible yet impenetrable barrier between the two sisters had begun to melt. It had been at this very instant that James' tawny owl burst into the room, bringing her a small love message. In its abrupt flight, the bird had narrowly missed Petunia's head. And while Mr. Evans petted the owl and his wife praised James' gallantry, Lily helplessly watched her sister withdraw behind her façade of irritation again.

Once the meal had been over, Petunia had risen from the table and retired to her room, locking the door behind her. At seven in the morning, she had been standing in the entrance hall, packed and ready to go, her beige suitcase in one hand, a train ticket in the other. No amount of pleas from her parents would encourage her to stay a moment longer. And it was all Lily's fault.

She could almost believe there had been no way out of the impasse. No matter what she did and how hard she tried to please Petunia, it always went wrong. The Christmas meeting, the wedding, and now even a simple family meal.

Naturally, James had found her guilty feelings misplaced.

"She's just jealous," he had declared as they were leaving Vernon and Petunia's wedding, his voice low with restrained anger. The groom had refused to acknowledge them during the reception, which had not prevented him from naming James an "amateur magician" within their earshot. "This normalcy she pretends to like so much is nothing more than a protective reaction. She does realize her averageness and can't bear it because you exceed her in so many ways. There is nothing you can do, and it's not your fault it's up to *her* to learn to accept things the way they are, and to love herself even if she's not what she'd like to be." His expression had darkened. "As for her 'dear Vernon,' I don't mean to offend you, but he's an arrogant imbecile. If it were for me, he would spend an hour with Malfoy or Lestrangle. I don't think he would be so proud any more."

When she had scolded him, he had demanded in a challenging tone, "Tell me what makes him so much better than them. Narrow minded, conceited, convinced of his superiority, dismissive of all the people who don't share his pathetic conception of the world ..."

"He loves my sister," she had reminded him, her voice strong with conviction.

Unfortunately, Petunia was far from being the only person Lily had unintentionally made suffer. In her mind, her sister's name was associated with another one, a male one, and she could not think of her faults toward the one without recalling her affronts toward the other.

Severus. Her best and oldest friend, the one who had made her enter the world of magic and had been her only support at Hogwarts during the early times. Ironically, he had also been the one to drive her away from her sister. The memory of the awful day when she had ended their friendship still made her cringe in shame. At the time, so strong were the feelings of hurt and betrayal that had overwhelmed her the moment he had insulted her that the same evening, she had rejected his apologies without as much as hearing him to the end. Her anger, however, had evaporated in a matter of two days. Severus' desolation and the fierce bullying he had been experiencing in the hands of the Marauders had made her understand how lost and humiliated he had felt. He had not intended to offend her.

Since the incident, she was never able to find the right time to talk to him. In the weeks following the O.W.L.s, she had barely seen him he had secluded himself in the dungeons, skipping meals and ignoring all of her letters. Firmly resolved to approach him again and offer him her own apologies for having been so unjust, she had come to his house during the summer holidays to knock at his door for dozens of minutes. It had not opened.

As the new school year had come, she had watched Severus change. While he had not avoided her openly, there had been a chilling distance in his voice and gestures that had made her attempts at a serious conversation futile. He had become closer and closer to his fellow Slytherins, chatting with them, following them wherever they

went, clearly growing more comfortable in their company as every day went by. His contact with Lily had soon been reduced to the gazes he gave her, from the Slytherin table and from his place in the Potions class, which had grown darker throughout the year.

His cold demeanor had escalated in their seventh year. The first time she and James had come down to breakfast together, their arms around each other's waist, nearly everyone in the Great Hall had stared at them, whispering in their passage. In this vast sea of faces, Lily had felt Severus' black eyes watch them with a burning intensity. She had risked a glance at him and had been taken aback by his livid expression, his composure gone without a trace. An acute stab of guilt had shot through her chest when she had realized what he must have been thinking of her: that of all the men she could have chosen to date, she had chosen his nemesis. But the remorse had faded as quickly as it had risen, for she knew James had changed. She had been watching him for long enough to find out how mature he had become; besides, he had given her his word never to hex other students again.

It had not been until a week later that she had caught him in a vicious duel with Severus in an isolated corridor. They had paid her protests no heed, and she had disarmed them before throwing herself between them so they would not attack each other physically. With a last, pointed glare in her direction, Severus had vanished in the darkness while James snarled after him, his face startlingly pale. He had remained silent for all the time she pressed him with questions and had only assured her, curt and tense, that he had not started the fight.

As far as Lily knew, there had been no more confrontations between them. Still, she had constantly been aware of a penetrating gaze turned upon her from the Slytherin table. And shortly before the graduation, Severus had finally given her an explicit, if disturbing, sign of attention. She had been leaving the library, a pile of books under her arm, when she saw him standing motionlessly at the door, his eyes fixed on her. His haughty posture had not relaxed even as she had come closer, and he manifestly had not intended to speak to her. Disconcerted by his voiceless scrutiny, she had squeezed herself with difficulty through the tiny space he left at the doorstep he had not moved back to allow her to exit and had walked away without looking back.

She presently sensed it had been a mistake; she should have talked to him then and there. As aloof and intimidating as he might have appeared, she ~~had~~ ^{new} he would not have turned her down, had she tried to address him. And despite the time elapsed since their final argument, despite his ostensible hostility and his undeniable fascination with Dark magic, Lily still cared about what he thought and felt. The idea of leaving Cokeworth without letting him know how much she regretted having been cruel to him was beyond painful. She had all the time in the world to appease Petunia. The same did not apply to Severus they would never be close again, given their different convictions and his insurmountable animosity toward James. If she wished to make peace with him, she had to do so before her departure.

The glimmering light in his window at Spinner's End danced in her mind, haunting and obsessive. Leaning against the door of Petunia's room for support anticipation and uneasiness made her knees buckle Lily promised herself to go to his house the following evening. If he refused to let her in, she could try again later. But she would not be surprised in the least if he forbade her from ever coming back.

It was a hot, airless evening; the nightfall had brought no breeze with the deepening shadow. Lily exhaled lightly, shaking off her nervousness as she raised her hand to ring the doorbell. A muffled tinkling sound pierced the air, followed by a hollow echo and what seemed to be an even more piercing silence. The seconds ticked by quietly. She heard no footsteps behind the door, no movement, no voice. She sighed in disappointed frustration and knocked emphatically, though she no longer expected an answer. But then, just as she curled her fingers again, the lock clicked. With a dull crack, the door slid ajar.

Lily pushed it open with a shaking hand. It revealed a minuscule hall, empty but for a pair of dark cloaks hanging from a coat stand. No one was waiting for her Severus had surely resorted to magic to let her enter.

There was pale light in the living room. Feeling slightly encouraged, she came in, taking in the once familiar place she had not seen for years. It had changed significantly, although the furniture itself the rickety table, the shabby armchairs, the faded sofa and the fragile-looking candle-lit lamp swinging from the ceiling remained the same. The difference came from the books that now covered every inch of the walls, which she remembered bare. Little piles of books were stacked up on the table, as well, and upon the carpet in the corners of the room. Most volumes were bound in black leather, which gave the room the aspect of a grim, eerie cellar. Or a cave.

But this unsettling atmosphere was not induced merely by the blackness of the walls. There was something else in the air, something heavy and foreboding that caused an icy shiver to run down Lily's spine. Setting her handbag on an armchair, she looked up at the nearest bookcase to read the titles of some of Severus' books. At that moment, she felt his presence behind her, and the chill on her skin intensified twofold. She swiftly turned around, catching on her way a glimpse of the title of an old large volume, *Secrets of the Darkest Art*.

Severus was standing at the kitchen entrance, a tall, dark silhouette on an equally dark background. In spite of the heat, the late hour and the fact he was alone, he was dressed in long-sleeved wizarding robes of thick fabric falling to his leather shoes. Lily had never seen him clad entirely in black before. For the first time, she fully realized how intimidating he was. His cold eyes darted to her face, studying her in much the same way he had been doing during their last encounter in the library. With a flush of embarrassment, she saw his look wander slowly downwards, stopping successively at the straps of her white Muggle top, at her neckline, at her hips and even at her feet beneath the hem of her long summer skirt. Then, in one fluid motion, his eyes rose back to hers, and a small, deliberate smile curved his lips, as glacial and dark as his gaze.

"Severus." The surprise his stern, so un-Muggle appearance and the mute threat emanating from his eyes and posture had elicited in her made her cautious greeting sound almost like a question.

His smile widened infinitesimally.

"Lily." Her name was uttered in a whispering voice, deeper than she remembered.

He came a few steps closer, his robes undulating in the air. He was moving with an unexpected grace, and his face exuded the imperious self-confidence Lily knew he had acquired in their last year, in the company of Slytherins. She felt a faint twinge of sadness at the memory of the anxious, insecure boy he had once been. She was sure anything, even being bullied, was better than frequenting a group of violent, elitist Dark wizards. But this was not what she had come to tell him.

When he gestured toward the seats, she hesitated.

"I'm not going to hold you, Severus," she said, lowering her eyes apologetically. "There is only something I need to tell you, something I've wanted to tell you for ages, but didn't have the chance to." She lifted her eyes back to his blank face and drew a deep breath. "I'm very, very sorry about what happened between us the day of the O.W.L., not accepting your apology, not speaking to you for days. I know you didn't mean to hurt me, and I assure you, I wasn't really angry at you. What I said was stupid, and I regret it so much. I'd like you to know I've always considered you my friend, and it doesn't matter what future we have chosen for ourselves or what other people think about it. I hope you'll be happy and that you will forgive me one day."

A long silence followed her confession. Tremulous, she searched his features for any hint of satisfaction or relief. His eyes glinted strangely. Unable to identify the emotion behind them, she waited while a peculiar, irrational apprehension was starting to creep into her heart. He moved forward, closing the distance between them in several strides. The intensity of his stare made her want to back away, but she brought herself to remain immobile. He laid his hands around her waist. His hair brushed her cheek as he bent down to whisper in her ear, "I knew you would come, Lily."

Frozen with shock, she did not move for what could have been minutes, though in reality, it barely took a breath. There was no possible doubt as to what his gesture insinuated. But this could not be real.

His hands slid lower. As if in a dream, she felt him nuzzle the tender skin below her ear while he pressed her against him *Against*... Her mind awoke with a jolt. She frantically pushed at his chest, but only felt his grip tighten.

"What do you think you're doing, Severus?" she hissed, her voice trembling with panic. "Stop it at once!"

"Hm?" His mocking purr vibrated against her throat. A tinge of fury and indignation colored the creamy skin of her cheeks and neck.

"Stop it!" She wriggled in his arms, desperate to break free. "Let me go!"

At this, he straightened up to look at her, his hold unrelenting, his eyes narrowed dangerously. From such a close distance, she could see how deeply black and inscrutable they were. But they betrayed one feeling, nonetheless, and that one was crystalline clear: desire. Her knees went almost weak with trepidation.

"Why would I do that?" he asked, his gaze locked on her. "I would never deny you what is yours. Besides, why else would you have come?"

This *had* to be a dream, nothing but a horrible dream.

"I came to apologize," she objected. "Didn't you understand what I said?"

"I understood every word you said," he whispered darkly. "And every word you *didn't* say."

He began to lower his face to hers. In her fright, she did not think; she slapped him with all her might. His eyes flashed fire, and with the faintest of growls, he released her and stepped back. The moment dragged on as they stood face to face, each watching the other's moves.

His hostile silence was a real torture to Lily. She needed to set him right. She chose her words very carefully.

"I've never meant to tease you, Severus. I'm sorry if I gave you the wrong impression. I only came to make my apologies and to assure you of my friendship. And as I said, I don't expect you to forgive me, even if I very much wish you did."

His hard, calculating expression did not soften. Lily's stomach clenched with anxiety, and a tiny voice in her mind murmured unceasingly she should not have come. She furtively glanced at the door, but before she could decide what to do next, it slammed shut, and so did the door to the kitchen. She looked back at Severus' smirking face.

"You are not going anywhere, Lily," he said gently, his wand brandished in his hand.

"What do you want?" She was grateful her tone sounded calm and even. She tried not to think about what she knew his response might be.

He arched an eyebrow, his voice tainted with a false kindness. "Why don't you sit down? After all, it has been years since we last talked."

She complied, settling into the armchair where her handbag was. She shielded it with her body, pushing it against the backrest discreetly. If she were quick enough, she would be able to take her wand out and immobilize him before he could harm her. By the time the charm wore off, she would be out of his reach. Reassured by this resolution, she turned a serene gaze at him.

Severus never took his eyes off hers. His features still lit up with amusement and lust, and he took a slow step toward her.

"You changed so much," Lily observed in an effort to distract his attention.

He gave her a half-sneer. "You changed, too. You have become even more enchanting."

Another step. She squeezed the armrests of her seat. She longed to tell him she was engaged to James, but was afraid of irritating him even further. However, she could not allow him to take such liberties with her any more.

"I'm moving out of Cokeworth next week," she said firmly.

He kept advancing on her, not a trace of surprise evident on his face. "Where?"

She replied nothing, and the corners of his mouth twitched. "Never mind. I know."

Her fingers closed around the armrests again, this time in anger. Would he dare to pursue her to James' own residence?

"If you were so eager to see me, why haven't you deigned to talk to me for the last two years?" Her voice dripped with bitterness. "I was more than willing to make up with you."

He considered her thoughtfully, his head inclined to one side, as he advanced on her unhurriedly. "Many things have changed."

"Meaning?"

A chuckle. "Well, I came to the conclusion there are certain people and things I can't get along without. You are one of them."

One of those people, or one of those things?

"You can't give up your Slytherin friends, can you?" She knew the answer all too well. "You know I don't approve of Dark magic. If you want to be one of them, then I must keep away from you."

He approached her, and she cringed in anticipation of his forceful attention. But instead, he turned toward the sofa and sat down; the sharp movement made her think of a spider lunging at its prey.

"You have always been a forgiving person," he remarked after a short silence, his tone icy but composed. "You were happy to forgive Potter's vanity and arrogance, not to mention all the pain he and his friends inflicted on others." Ignoring her attempts to protest, he went on, "You were happy to forgive your sister for being mean to you and even for regarding you as a freak. I'm the only one you don't seem able to accept for who I am, yet you know how important my friends and my occupations are to me. I wonder why."

"Neither James nor Petunia hang around with Dark wizards whose favorite activity is to kill Muggles and Muggle-borns." Lily's voice rose as she unconsciously leaned forward in her seat. "Do you really believe it, Severus? That people like me shouldn't exist? That they deserve to be prosecuted?"

He looked as though he were restraining himself from rolling his eyes. "I've never considered you inferior to anyone, Lily, and you know it. This isn't about you. It's about my future. The group I'm referring to possesses power and influence."

"And you would harm innocent people for power?" she asked feebly.

His silence was eloquent enough.

"Severus," she breathed, and her hand moved inadvertently as if to hold his. "It's just an illusion. What these... people say is as far from the truth as one can get. They may be pure-bloods and influential, but they follow a ruthless madman who has no respect for them or anyone else whatsoever. Their actions are wrong, and their lives are empty and warped. It's a vicious circle once you become involved, it's hard to break away. Besides..."

Her voice trailed off. He was not listening. His eyes were glued on her moving lips with the captivation of an entranced snake. His breathing had visibly sped up, and his long fingers had tensed on his lap. A dense fog of fear enveloped Lily's mind, chaining her limbs, but was nearly instantly supplanted by a wave of fury.

"Severus!"

He drew his gaze back to hers and smiled daringly as to ask, 'Yes?'. Once more, they remained quiet, her fern green eyes struggling to read the thoughts hidden behind his bottomless black ones.

"I was merely saying that I find it beyond absurd to support a man who sees you as no more than a useful servant," she finished earnestly. "He tortures his followers as if they were his enemies."

"That's the way the world goes," he retorted. "He is the greatest wizard of our age. It's his privilege to exert his force on all those who are weaker than him. And his followers are allowed to do the same, since their power is inferior only to his own."

Lily shook her head while the gooseflesh of dread spread all over her pale skin. "No amount of power has ever made anyone happy. Only love and friendship can bring you the satisfaction you seek."

"Really?" A menacing gleam appeared in the depths of Severus' eyes. "Then would you kindly tell me, Lily, what kind of satisfaction love has brought me? In the end, what did your friendship give me, apart from being kicked away for Potter's sake?"

She wished to answer, but no words presented themselves to her. Her mouth went dry. Nothing of what she could say would make any difference now. The undisguised resentment in his question caused a twinge of pain and regret to spear her like a sword.

"I'll tell you a secret, Lily," he said, his tone low and cold as he came closer, his face a mere foot from hers. "There is no such thing as happiness. No such thing as Fate that would guide you to the object of your dreams. They both are utopias the gentle souls invented to deal with the cruelty of the world. They have no idea about the way life works. That the only way to find satisfaction is to take what you want. If you are strong enough."

His left hand moved to her face. The spidery fingers brushed her cheek in the lightest of caresses, then slithered down her neck, seizing a strand of her wavy dark red hair to stroke and pet it. Transfixed, Lily closed her eyes and opened them again. She felt vertiginous. Chill was seeping through her pores, flooding her breast with a tremendous sense of danger. She could not resist when his hand buried itself in her locks. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw his sleeve glide down. It revealed a glimpse of something black.

At first, she was certain she would swoon from the force of her fear, and it was not without a little surprise that she realized her eyes were prickling with tears. She was so late.

"What have you done, Sev?" she whispered.

A spark of glee flashed through his eyes. His fingers, still entangled in her hair, curled into a fist, and he pulled her head toward him. She gasped in pain.

"This is wrong. You are ruining your life," she protested with a whimper.

His sinister smile widened. "Quite the contrary, Lily. I haven't felt better in a very, very long time. I now have everything I want, and you came to me of your own free will."

Before he could reiterate his forcible attempt to kiss her, she jerked her head from his grasp, disregarding the pain. Her terror gave her an unexpected new surge of strength, and she leaped to her feet. What happened next took a few seconds at the most. He stood up, and a wand appeared in his hand so quickly that she had not even registered the movement. He raised it, and she threw herself aside to avoid his curse. It was not intended for her, though. Instead of hexing her, he waved his wand in the direction of the armchair she had been sitting on seconds ago, and her handbag vanished. All the color drained from Lily's face at the sight. Without her wand, she was lost.

Severus watched her back against one of the locked doors as he nonchalantly slipped his wand back into his sleeve.

"Silly girl," he purred, stepping closer. "I wish you no harm. Why do you refuse to understand it?"

"Let me go." Although her steely voice betrayed none of her panic, her heart was threatening to burst in her chest.

He ignored her.

"You know," he mused darkly, nearing her shivering figure, "there actually was a period of time when I wanted you to leave, to disappear. There were also moments when I wanted to hurt you, to torture you, even to *kill* you. I hoped it would release me from your spell, even though I knew, deep down, it couldn't. You've haunted me for much too long your death would only make it worse. It would increase your power over me tenfold... and drive me insane." His eyes seemed to be clouding in his baleful reflection. "Sometimes I wonder if madness wouldn't be a relief, though. You don't know how it feels to be considered unworthy by the only person you love, or to spend every waking moment of your nights because you have no dreams thinking of her. There is no curse terrible enough in the Dark Arts to convey this feeling of torture. And the worst part of it is that I *know* I deserve it."

His hands shot up and clasped her arms in an iron grip. He was looming over her, his black hair falling into his wild eyes. But the look on his face was no longer the same. A flicker of a feeling that could be none other than anguish passed across his features before his eyes filled with a delirious determination.

"Lily." His whisper came out husky, and the bruising pressure of his fingers on her arms mounted to a nearly unbearable point. "It is not too late. I can still take you to the Dark Lord he will be most pleased to make such a witch as yourself one of his followers. You will have fortune, power and social status. No one will ever dare to say a word about your blood or origin any more. I'll see to it personally. I'll never leave you, I promise. Come with me now."

More frightened than she had ever felt, Lily wavered. Would he release her if she feigned to accept? But it would be foolish to believe she could deceive him. And in truth, she had no desire to try to do such a thing.

"No," she breathed, her choice made long before she had actually given it a thought.

The word killed the faint glint of emotion in his eyes, which darkened ominously. The next instant, the room span around her, and she was lying on the floor, her vision obscured from the sudden impact. The lamp was swaying in the air, sending pools of light and shadow across the walls. And then his hands were upon her. They roamed over her curves possessively, and hot breath blew onto her neck before his teeth sank into the exposed flesh, hungry and rough.

She bucked and flailed like a trapped animal. There was no way she was going to let this happen; it was inconceivable. She had to get out of this horrible place and, once she succeeded, never come back. Her wand had been taken from her; however, her fright and tension rendered the magic within her more powerful than ever, and it expanded in her members like an avalanche. A tremendous vibration shook her hands, and Severus hissed in pain: she had instinctively cast the Stinging Hex, burning holes in his robes in a haze of dim white light.

He instantly had her wrists pinned with one hand while the other sneaked down her torso, tearing the fabric of her clothes with a wandless Severing Charm. This prompted her to double her efforts, and she writhed underneath him, desperately trying to prevent him from sliding any lower. With an inadvertent blow of her foot, she knocked a pile of books to the ground, and they scattered with a rustle, the pages turning in a blur. Neither of them paid the volumes any attention. Severus reached the hem of her ruined top, and with a shudder of alarm, she felt him pause before mouthing an indistinct spell, a look of deep concentration on his face. A warm tingle of pleasure coursed through her loins, spreading in her veins with a shocking speed and intensity.

It was a dark, enticing charm, Lily could not doubt it. She blushed at the indecent sensation and shut her eyes tight, taking deep breaths to brace herself against the sudden thrill in the most intimate parts of her body. With enough focus, it was possible to overcome the spell even if she had had no opportunity to create a protective shield. Nearly

immediately, however, she was forced to realize how difficult it was to resist under the circumstances. Every movement she made caused her torso to brush against his in a light rubbing motion, and frissons of pleasure danced over her skin. She wanted to howl in desperation. When his hand wandered up her now bare thigh, she grit her teeth and thrashed her restricted arms, not trusting herself to move her legs any more. In her mind, she was feverishly considering a hex that would set her free.

"*Relashio*," she whispered, concentrating on the incantation for all she was worth.

As if he had been reading her mind, though, Severus seemed to be expecting the spell. He blocked it with a lazy *Protego*, and without giving Lily a chance to react, he muttered a conjuration she had never heard before.

She steeled herself at once for any kind of pain or pleasure, for that matter he intended to put her through, but waited in vain. The only thing she was aware of was Severus' cold hand traveling across her stomach while his lips explored the small hollow on the base of her throat. Unable to endure it any longer, she bucked fiercely, jerking her head to a side, and her eyes settled on one of the bookcases. What she saw made her stiffen with stupefaction.

On the upper shelves, heavy leather-bound volumes were vibrating, ready to fall. After a long, suspenseful moment of tremor, they slipped over the edge and crashed down onto the floor, inches from Lily's face. Astonished, she turned her eyes to the opposite wall and sighted another dozen books flopping in a rain of torn pages and dust, all landing up dangerously close to their struggling frames. Imprisoned in Severus' stifling embrace and reduced to a near immobility by the Dark charm, Lily watched in horror as the bookcases quaked around her; for an instant, she even stayed oblivious to his relentless advances. A sharp pinch on her nipple that he promptly captured with his mouth compelled her to come to her senses, just as a long finger ran over her core. The wave of arousal made her arch and pant even as her vision remained full of the incomprehensible quivering of the shelves.

Somewhere in the back of her mind, she wondered why he did not stop, why he did not acknowledge the destruction of his room, but the panic and the strain the falling books brought upon her, not to mention the shameful response of her body to his ministrations, did not leave her any room for speculation. It was pure torture. Clinging to the last remnants of her reason and self-control, she lamely tried to pull her hands free, to no avail. The next moment, the finger probing her center slid into her entrance, and a gasp of both pleasure and distress escaped her.

The disarray was turning into chaos. The walls trembled, dust swirled in the air, pieces of parchment flitted to the carpet. All the while, she fought the building desire within her, her judgment slowly clouding with need. His hands were all over her aching skin, feeling her, *opening* her to him. The humiliating word resounded in her head, but there was no force left in her to resist. Only dimly did she register that he had finally let go of her wrists and that she was convulsively clutching the material of his robes.

Suddenly, through a daze, she understood. It was not real. It could only be an illusion. The mysterious curse Severus had used against her must have been created with the purpose of affecting the victim with false visions to distract her. The bookcases certainly stood intact, and the havoc she was witnessing was solely an effect of the incantation. But far from relieving her anxiety or dissipating the hallucination, the knowledge fueled her torment even further.

At that very second, he penetrated her. They moaned in pleasure, and his hand rose to brutally grab her breast, the slight sting of pain amplifying her consuming lust. His face framed by oily black hair was hovering above hers on the background of the crumbling bookcases and the thudding dark volumes, and his eyes, similar to black magnets, burned their way into her own. Abruptly and without warning, he leaned forward and covered her lips with his. She succumbed, too weak to struggle any more, letting him taste and explore her mouth.

Was that deep, thundering noise in the house another phantasm induced by his curse, or was it as real as the scent of herbs, smoke and plaster filling her nostrils? Was the massive earthquake underneath them produced by the heat of their bodies, or was it natural as well? Lily could barely separate reality from delusion any more. While sharpened by the spell to the extreme, her senses appeared to be grotesquely distorted, and it seemed to her the fire in her groin was not only palpable, but also audible. She could practically *hear* it glow at the junction of their bodies. She would have tried to feel it with her hands, had those not been enlaced with Severus'.

His eyes gleamed as he bent down to claim her lips once again, and after a few last, powerful thrusts, her womb clenched in a series of almost painful spasms, bringing her the much desired release and a rush of pleasure too acute to really feel good. Over the wizard's head, she saw the ceiling fall into fragments and reveal a glimpse of the starry sky, and off to her side, there was a brief flash of the Dark Mark. Then they were buried under a torrent of debris, and everything went black.

The crackle of the fire woke her up from unconsciousness, which had gradually become slumber. A tiny bead of sweat was creeping down between her shoulder blades, slow and deliberate. Her breasts were flat against the mattress, and her face lay half-buried in the pillow, her flaming mane of hair thrown to one side. A strange, unfamiliar smell emanated from the bed sheets she was settled upon. It disturbed her, but she was too weary, too languid to pull her head away. With a sigh, she drew her hand to her nose as to block it, and her eyelids fluttered open.

The first thing Lily saw was the fireplace in the middle of the opposite wall covered with yellowish wallpaper. The wall was falling down. A surge of adrenaline flooded her limbs, and in a split of a second, she was curled up in a sitting position, her lips frozen in a silent yelp. But as her eyes adapted to the lighting, she relaxed slightly. It had only been a trick of her exhausted mind.

She straightened up on the narrow bed and glanced around her, her gaze still bleary with sleep and confusion. The little room was equipped very modestly and contained almost no furniture apart from a minuscule wardrobe and a nightstand. There was even no window. The fire flickered in the hearth, bringing heat into the already airless bedroom.

Firmly, she suppressed her escalating feeling of alarm. To calm her racing heart, she exhaled steadily and lifted her hand to wipe droplets of sweat off her forehead. The movement turned her attention to the deep bruises around her arms and wrists. Particularly abundant on her bosom, the marks and sore spots trailed down her abdomen toward her intimate parts, which were still hurting and swollen. She *still* was naked.

She shuddered as the memory of what had taken place before she had passed out hit her with full force. The mere idea of those dreadful hallucinations made her go giddy, and she could not bring herself to even formulate what had happen for real. Flashbacks whirled in her mind, crude and taunting: the lustful stare, the restricting hand, the fingers tearing through her clothes with wandless magic, the roughness of his robes against her skin... *No*.

Lily threw the thin blanket aside and leaped to her feet. However difficult it was, she would not allow herself to think of the horrid evening before she got home and was safe and ready to deal with it. She turned toward the exit and stopped dead in her tracks. The handle on the door was missing. No, it could *not* be; her eyes had surely not recovered yet from their illusionary perceptions. Not trusting her sight any more, she lunged to the entrance, palpating the even surface desperately to find the knob, the handle or the lock, *anything*. It was no use: there was nothing but plain wood. The panic she was trying so hard to smother began to spread its icy tentacles through her chest.

She rushed to the fireplace. If the chimney were large enough, it would be possible to use as an escape way after she put out the fire. She fell on her knees in front of the hearth and extended an arm, prepared to utter a spell and extinguish the flames. Instantaneously, she was propelled backwards with an irresistible force and found herself thrown onto her elbows. Her second attempt was no more fruitful. A magical barrier had been established around the fire so it could not be approached.

Frenzied, Lily looked around her again and spotted the nightstand. It was empty except for a simple table clock which indicated it was two hours after midnight. There was now only the wardrobe left. She yanked its doors open, ran through the hanging robes, delved into the drawers. Nothing she came across could help her escape. Without choosing, she snatched something resembling a shapeless dressing gown from a hanger and covered her nudity. Then she sat back on the edge of the bed, her head spinning and swimming.

She was being held captive. Clearly, he had brought her to this room her prison once she had lost consciousness. She had never been there before, but judging from her simple surroundings, it was one of Severus' bedrooms on the first floor. Why had he done this? For how long did he intend to keep her locked up? Was he going to conceal her from everyone else and pretend, should anyone ask, that she had never come?

Her agitation grew with every minute, reality fully sinking in. He had become a Death Eater. He had joined He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named and received the Dark Mark. He was bound to hunt, torture and kill people like herself. And her heart missed a beat like her parents. What if he threatened them? In all likelihood, he would not hesitate to hurt them to assure her obedience. He could also take her to his master. She had heard a few rumors about the Death Eater orgies, and they all were horribly revealing: Dark magic, torture and violations of Muggles, alcohol, blood.

No one knew she was here. Although James was aware Severus lived in the same district as Lily's family, he would have no rightful reason to bring an action against him once she was reported missing. He might suspect his old enemy, if only on principle, and even contact him, but what proof did he have? He would never get the occasion to search this house.

She had to escape. There had to be a way. Once more, she glanced around the room, twisting her hands in dismay. Her look fell onto the bare walls. Why was there no window? It made no sense, and as far as she could tell, it did not correspond with the appearance of the building's façade. Could the window have possibly been put under a spell, just like the fireplace? It was the only plausible answer, and Lily felt almost sure she could apply it to the misshapen door, too. She found no other explanation as to why it would lack a handle and a lock.

She rose and approached the wall she faced, pressing her hands to the place where the window ought to be.

Finite Incantatem, she thought, focusing hard. Nothing changed.

Finite Incantatem. Finite Incantatem.

Nothing. The ordinary counter-spell held no power here. She shut her eyes and propped her forehead against the wall, summoning all the magical force she possessed. In her mind, she recalled all the potential charms that could help. She cast them one after another, trying to not let her failures affect her, until she reached the last one.

Palliatum Revelo.

For a moment, she kept her eyes closed, afraid it had not worked either. To her immense relief, however, the texture of the wall beneath her hands started to change. The smooth surface of the wallpaper was dissolving and transforming into glass, and the contours of a window emerged.

Her knees weak with joy, she thanked her lucky stars. At present, all she had to do was open it without making the slightest noise. It was much safer to flee through the window, since the door led to his private rooms.

"*Alohomora*," she whispered.

But the simple unlocking charm was not sufficient; it was purely designed for mechanical locks, and the window had obviously been secured with magic. Lily clenched her teeth in frustration, inwardly cursing Severus' thoroughness. She transferred her attention from the enchanted handle to the transparent surface.

Evanesco.

Nothing. Her hands were shaking, and not from the magic.

Diffindo!

Tiny fissures appeared on the glass, branching and wrinkling the seemingly unyielding material. Lily breathed a sigh of contentment, then stiffened again, apprehensive. How could she break the glass while remaining quiet and unperceived? Quickly, she cast the Imperturbable Charm around the window, praying it was strong enough to provide her the discretion she needed. Fear and strain were beginning to wear out her concentration, and she could feel her magic waver with fatigue.

On the count of three, she inhaled sharply and put every ounce of effort she could muster into the most powerful Severing Charm she had ever performed. The glass exploded soundlessly into a fountain of shards, and anxious not to waste any more time, Lily threw herself out of the window, slowing a little before she softly landed on the ground. It was something she had learned in her earliest years before she had found out she was a witch.

The window of the ground floor was half-open, and there was light behind the curtains of the living room. Lily wished nothing more than to leave the sinister street at once, but she knew Severus still had her wand. Without it, she would neither be able to Disapparate nor to cast any of the more complicated spells, and she would be entirely defenseless, should she confront him again. Carefully, she peered through the window. He was not there.

This was not merely risky, it was suicidal, but she had to try. It was necessary to retrieve her wand. It might have been hidden in this room, and with a little luck, she could Summon it and flee. In case the wand was gone, she would have to give it up and run home. Once there, she could use the Floo powder to get to James' house, and together, they would decide what to do next. The hope she would succeed was thin, but it did exist. She refused to even think of the third possible outcome and of what might happen if Severus noticed her wand fly toward the window and slip out. She had no choice but try.

Once again, Lily closed her eyes and concentrated. Drips of sweat rolled down her forehead, gluing her hair to her face. After a torturous dozen of seconds, the wand came swishing into her hand. With a small jolt of euphoria at the realization how fortunate she was, she cast a new Imperturbable Charm around herself to muffle the pop of her Disapparition and turned on the spot.

She reappeared on her hands and knees in her parents' front room, her mind so dizzy from the instant transportation that she had to clutch her mouth with both her hands to repress her sudden wave of nausea. As she raised her eyes, her look fell onto the old family bookcase. A violent spasm contorted her lean body, and she could no longer contain herself.

This was wrong, she thought weakly while her stomach clenched on itself, having nothing to throw up. She had no time for this nonsense. Severus would detect her absence any moment now, and he would know where to look for her. And her parents were here. She did not have as much as a second to lose.

She lifted herself off the floor shakily, one hand propped against the wall for support. As swiftly as she could, she went up the stairs, heading for her parents' room. She was not leaving them anywhere near a Death Eater. For once, she felt grateful Petunia had already left. As soon as she returned to James, they would have to make sure the Dursleys' house was protected with proper magical wards.

Lily's eyes strayed to the pictures arranged on the walls she was passing, and she swallowed sadly, her throat constricted. This was not how she had imagined parting with her home. She wished she could take her magical tools with her, as well as her parents' belongings and the objects she treasured the most. But there was no time to collect any of those; they all would stay behind. She gently opened the door to her parents' bedroom. Before either of them could wake up, she cast a spell to plunge them into a deeper sleep. She would explain everything to them later, she promised herself desperately.

All of a sudden, a dull noise resounded downstairs. Lily nearly jumped in terror, convinced it had been the entrance door snapping open. She looked over her shoulder, her nerves on edge, and ran toward the bed. Her wand in her hand, she gripped her father's and her mother's arms, concentrating feverishly on the guest room in James' house. The contours of the bedroom vanished, and in a few seconds, she found herself with her parents on the carpet in the chosen place.

She could not believe it. They were safe. The thought of her sister, however, dampened her feeling of elation immediately it was not over. She carefully levitated the sleeping couple onto the bed and covered them.

James was in the living room. He had fallen asleep on the couch, his glasses slightly askew on his nose, his new book *Quidditch Through the Ages*, open on his chest. In spite of her distress, Lily could not suppress a little smile as a tide of love and relief filled her chest. She raised her hand to wake him up with a caress.

"James..."

He stirred and mumbled her name sleepily, his own hand slowly moving to his face to catch hers. But when he opened his eyes and peered at her, taking in her state she still was disheveled and dressed in the shapeless dressing gown alarm showed all over his face, and he sat up abruptly, letting the book slide onto the floor.

"Lily!"

She collapsed in his arms, allowing, for the first time in hours, her emotions to surmount her.

The first pale beams of sunlight were piercing through the floating shadows of the room, fading in front of the couch engulfed in the dark where Lily lay motionless with her head on James' lap while he stroked her hair. She could not move. They had spent the previous hour in Little Winging, putting all the protective charms they knew upon the house of the unsuspecting Dursleys. By the end, James had to bring the exhausted Lily home in his arms.

Mr. and Mrs. Evans were still asleep, unaware of the changes they had gone through. In the morning, she would tell them she had been attacked by a group of masked Dark wizards known as Death Eaters, whom she had managed to elude by a hair's-breadth, and that Cokeworth was no longer safe. It was almost exactly what she had said to James. She knew only too well what would happen if she told him the truth: he would go and confront Severus to avenge her. She could not allow this. James was a skilled and powerful wizard, but his innate revulsion for the Dark Arts had made him neglect a great deal of the subject. He did not know half of the curses Severus had mastered, and if it came to a duel, his life would be doomed.

She had forgotten to heal the bite marks and bruises on her skin. It did not matter. She would worry about them later; right now, she was thankful for being able to lie and breathe.

James was whispering softly, his fingers light and soothing on her face.

"I'm so sorry, my love, so sorry. I promise it won't happen again. I'll never leave you alone and unprotected. You and your parents will be safe, I swear. There is a way to defeat them. The day before yesterday, old Bathilda told me encouraging news I couldn't wait to share with you. It appears that Dumbledore founded a secret organization to fight You-Know-Who and the Death Eaters; they call it the Order of the Phoenix. As we're of age, we could join them. The faster those bastards are destroyed, the safer we'll all be. Padfoot has already volunteered, and he promised to ask Moony and Wormtail. Would you like to join, too, my love? But we can talk about it tomorrow, when you feel better. You should have a rest now. Everything will be fine."

On other occasions, his caring, susurrant voice would lull her to sleep. But nothing was as before, not with the memories of her dark visions dancing in her mind and the cold silky voice resonating in her ears. It would take long before she could sleep peacefully again, she thought, dejected, inhaling the familiar scent of his shirt to calm her anguished spirit.

At the same moment, the Evans' house in Cokeworth was breaking down in a sea of flames as terrible as was the rage of the Dark wizard who had set them.