

All the Luck in the World

by Noelani Sitara

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instead of...

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He never should have stayed. He should have known better – damn it, he should have kept his mind focused, instead of...

No matter, now, he thought, taking a delicate swig from his wineglass. There was no way to get out of it. He'd just have to be a man and take it like he ought. Take it like he didn't have a care in the whole bloody world for—

"Severus."

He closed his eyes and inhaled. Damn. Exhaling slowly, he turned. "Yes, Albus?"

The elderly wizard looked at him curiously. "In all the years you've been here, you've never stayed past dinner."

Severus resisted the urge to reply scathingly. Instead, he waited for the inevitable, gritting his teeth.

Albus slowly rolled his lemon drop in his mouth, pondering. He hesitated.

"Just ask," Severus ground out.

"Well, my boy, when you insist – why are you here? After all the years I've tried so hard to manipulate you, persuade you, force you to stay – why now?"

Severus released his breath, relieved. This he could handle. He raised an eyebrow and turned away from Albus. "I don't have to explain my motives to you, old man," he muttered and promptly ignored him, ending the conversation.

Out of the corner of his eye, he could see Albus frowning, obviously puzzled. Two minutes later Albus joined Minerva at the punch table.

Now Severus did roll his eyes. He wanted to pound his head in frustration. Of all the *stupid* things to do! He had no excuse for this. None at all.

He'd been a good spy, hadn't he? He'd trained hard, suffered long, endured miles and miles of endless torture. He'd done it all, and he'd *still* survived. With all his body parts, even though the – here he sneered – Dark Lord had tried to make him pay for his treacheries, he'd escaped.

So what the hell was wrong with him now?

He stared at his glass.

He had been about to excuse himself as he customarily did every year. He could even imagine Albus, sitting with his hands steeped to his lips, frowning at him disapprovingly.

Wiping his mouth with his napkin one last time, he set it down and pushed away from the table, slowly rising.

A soft hand on his arm froze him.

Her. Every fiber in his being was suddenly afire with the knowledge that she had touched him and asked him a question.

He stared at her dumbly. He hadn't heard the question, and she was waiting for an answer.

"Excuse me, Mrs. Weasley – I'm afraid I didn't hear you correctly."

The achingly familiar rosy tinge dusted her cheeks as she smiled at him. "I'm sorry, Severus. I was just wondering if you were leaving so early."

His eyes never left hers.

Next to her, her husband reached across for a bread roll and looked at them curiously. "Stay, Snape," he said between gulps, "we never even see you anymore."

That smile was still on her lips.

He nodded curtly to the both of them and sat back down. Once seated, he realized he had not the faintest idea of what to say.

"So, Severus. How have you been?"

He looked sideways at her and cleared his throat. "The same, as always. Same batch of ignorant students, same amount of endless classes, same routine every day."

But never what he truly wanted.

"And you, Mrs. Weasley?"

She blushed. "Severus, how many times must I ask you to call me—"

"As long as propriety stands and you are married..."

He blinked, realizing what he had just said. His hands trembled underneath the table, and he mentally berated himself for such a slip-up.

If she had understood, she gave no notice of it.

"Well, I suppose I'll just have to remind you every chance I get."

Every day, if you wish.

Her husband leaned in on the other side of her.

"Excuse me," she said and turned to speak privately with him.

Severus forced his eyes to stay on his plate, even though his eyes kept trailing back to where she sat. She and her husband rarely visited Hogwarts – tonight was the first time in the three years since they had returned from Egypt.

Not that he kept track.

As she caught his attention once more, he turned to her.

"I'm sorry, Severus, but it appears we must be going. Family matters and such," she whispered, grinning.

Though he didn't smile, he attempted to appear slightly amused. "I hope your children are well."

"They are, thank you. Should be attending Hogwarts in a few years. I hope you'll treat them well – or at least a bit less harsh than the rest of your poor students."

He snorted. "I will try, Mrs. Weasley." Anything.

She nodded and patted his shoulder. "Goodbye, Severus. Hopefully we'll see you next year?"

He paused. "Of course."

They left, saying farewell to the other professors on their way out.

"Goodbye, Hermione," Albus said, "and come again soon. You too, Ronald."

Ron chuckled and led Hermione out. They disappeared into the night, laughing as they discussed the latest adventures of their children.

Severus sat back in his seat, refusing to let his turbulent emotions show on his face.

He had sworn long ago never to be jealous – or at least to never let anyone know. And he intended to keep that promise.

He never should have stayed. He should have known better – damn it, he should have kept his mind focused, instead of thinking about her and the life they could never have shared.