

Every Saint Is An Accident

by TeddyRadiator

Petunia Evans saw her sister as the the symbol of perfection she could never attain. Severus Snape saw her as the ultimate woman he could never win. They saw one another as the ultimate revenge for what they could never have. Written for the LiveJournal's 2015 Severus_fest.

Chapter One

Chapter 1 of 1

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From the LiveJournal Severus_Fest 2015.

Prompt#63 - Petunia would never admit it, but she always envied Lily her magic and she has a very secret kink for bad guys. She wanted Severus since the first time when Lily brought him home. When they meet again (up to you how that is possible) she still wants him. Badly.

Disclaimer: Normal disclaimer applies

A/N: Dear prompter thank you for such a great prompt! I hope I was able to give you what you wanted. Many thanks to my beta, Stgulik, for encouraging me not to give up, for cheerleading and incredible editing work at extremely short notice. Also a huge genuflection to the Mods for their patience and for hosting the fest. Title is from Randall Bramlett's song - The Bright Spots Album.

When she was told the war was over, Petunia had not asked who won. She had not asked who died. She had only asked when they could return to Privet Drive.

Throughout the foreign, off-kilter months they had spent in hiding, she would calm herself by mentally walking through each room, taking stock of each item. Envisioning home was all that kept her from going mad. Now, looking around the house she and Vernon had called home for almost twenty years, she found it disconcerting that she wasn't completely sure where everything had originally been. It was important, she thought, to have things in the right place, to look in this or that direction and see exactly what the eye expected to see.

During their time in exile, all her careful constructs of being normal, of being just another family in another little village in leafy Surrey, crumbled without so much as the occasional distraction of spying on her neighbours to stop the landslide into misery. In those nine months away, she had lost weight on a frame that couldn't afford it to begin with, while Vernon and Dudley, bored and unhappy, had grown larger, as if absorbing that which she had lost.

Now that they were back, Petunia felt an almost desperate need to return to normal, whatever that was. She also wanted to recapture the feeling that she was needed, even if it was only the house on Privet Drive that needed her. It was certainly true that during their time away it had grown dull and slovenly, like an old widower left to fend for himself. It certainly hadn't thrived under the care of that Mrs. Figg, who had promised to look in and keep it neat.

"You'd think the woman had never *seen* a duster before," she muttered under her breath, rubbing oil into the furniture with a zeal that bordered on manic. "Then again, looking at her house..."

She was just emptying the last box labeled 'Kitchen, Lwr Cabinets' when she heard a sharp, cracking noise outside the house, and froze, her heart beating with hope. She bit her lip, ran a quick, nervous hand over her still-tidy hair and headed for the door. She could see a dark-haired man standing behind the frosted glass window, and her stomach gave a fluttering jolt.

Then a voice called out. "Aunt Petunia?"

She didn't bother to hide her disappointment as she opened the door. "Oh, it's you," she said tonelessly, making sure the word 'you' carried the sour tang of curdled milk. "What do you want?"

He hesitated for a moment, then asked, "May I come in?"

Still holding the doorknob, she stepped away from the entrance, and he entered the hallway, looking around. "They told me you'd come home," he said, his voice quiet and deep.

Petunia nodded regally. "I would offer tea, but the kettle's not unpacked." It was a lie, but he didn't have to know that. A sudden gust of cool air blew into the house, and she closed the door.

"And I'm sorry, but I'm afraid we've committed to renting out the spare room to a lodger, so..." Another lie, but she wanted to nip any idea of his returning in the bud. She'd had enough of him. He'd been nothing but trouble from the start.

"I understand you don't want me here, and believe me the feeling is mutual," he answered testily. Strangely enough, that rather spiteful tone made Petunia feel a little better. This was the boy she remembered; the one she knew how to deal with.

"I won't be moving back here. Sirius Black...remember him? My godfather? He left me his house in town. My fiancée and I are going to live there."

A long silence stretched between them while Petunia struggled not to ask anything that could be construed as personal. "I take it your side won?" she asked finally.

He nodded. "Yes. I suppose you could say we did. Win, that is." For another long moment they simply looked at one another. "Well," he said, and took off his glasses, "I came to let you know about something. Someone."

"What is it?" She looked around. "I'm afraid I'm rather busy, so if you don't mind—"

"Severus Snape is dead," Harry said. "I...I know you knew him from ... from when my mother was alive."

Petunia didn't react; she merely stared at him. "I want you to know he died a hero's death," he continued. "He was a spy for the Order, working to bring down the enemy from within. Anyway, I thought you'd want to know."

"And why on earth would you possibly think that?" she managed.

"Because he left you something." Harry put his glasses back on and withdrew a sealed envelope from his jacket pocket, handing it to her at arm's length. "He had no next of kin, so a few of us volunteered to pack up his, um, personal things. I found this note among them."

Petunia took the envelope out of Harry's hand, and was relieved that her own hand was steady. Dazedly, she looked down at heavy, stiff parchment.

On it, her name was written in stiff, formal letters: *Petunia Evans Dursley*

She raised her eyes to Harry. "Did you open this?" she demanded.

"No!" He looked at her in surprise, as if the thought had never occurred to him.

"Alright," she said, as dry as dust. When he didn't reply, she continued, "Well, I have a great deal to do." So calm. She sounded so calm.

Harry nodded. If he was at all curious, he gave no indication. "Goodbye, Aunt Petunia."

She didn't move until long after the crack of Apparition faded, like thunder in a retreating storm. Finally, like a sleepwalker, Petunia turned and walked up the stairs. She entered the bedroom she shared with her husband, and sat down on her side of the bed.

He's never coming back. I'll never see him again. Severus is dead.

She forced herself to look down at the envelope again. The fingers tracing the letters were now cold and trembling.

Petunia

For a second, she could picture him writing it, hunched over, a frown of concentration on his severe face, writing out her name with brisk, purposeful strokes of his quill. Words he would never write again, would never speak again. And yet he still had something to say to her.

She couldn't quite make herself open it. Her instincts told her the words in this letter would make his death real for her in a way Harry's words had not. For one last selfish moment, she wanted to remember Severus alive.

Lily was forever bringing home strays. A week didn't go by that some mangy puppy or bedraggled kitten turned up, tucked in the skirt of her dress like dirty laundry in an apron. She seemed to attract them, draw these miserable creatures to her in a way that was both charming and irresponsible.

Then again, Lily had always been able to attract everything. She was pretty and sweet, with long auburn hair, freckles and smiling green eyes, where Petunia was thin and pale, dark-haired and muddy-eyed. No wonder their father doted on Lily; their mum had always appreciated Petunia's pragmatic nature, but neither of their parents made any great secret that Lily was their golden child.

Lily dragged her latest foundling into the kitchen. "Tune, this is Severus Snape," she announced absently, rooting through the icebox. "I met him at the park."

Petunia and Severus stared at one another distrustfully. For once, Petunia knew more about something than Lily did. She had once heard her da talking about Severus' parents. 'The Sniping Snapes,' he had called them: the man of the house always drunk and looking for a fight, the missus too stringy and meek to give him one. Da always talked about people like the Snapes as if they were inferior, a lower order of beings to the Evans'.

Petunia decided she didn't like Severus Snape. He was a grubby, weedy little boy, pale and messy; the type people in books called an 'urchin.' It certainly fit him, all hand-me-down clothes and dirty nails. Petunia sniffed disdainfully. "You're that boy who lives in Spinner's End, aren't you?"

He gave her a sidelong glance, insolent and wary. "And what if I am?"

His voice, even then, was low and gruff. Something about that look made Petunia feel strange. "Why are your clothes so dirty?" she demanded.

"Petunia!" Her mother exclaimed in that disapproving tone she never used with Lily. "Don't be so rude," she admonished, but she glanced at Severus with similar discomfort. "Some folks aren't as well off as yourself, and they can't always ... well, they don't have the...."

Her mum stopped, caught in the boy's glower. It would be years before Petunia was old enough to read the look Severus gave her mother. It was too complicated for a young girl to understand how lethal pride and misery and defiance can be in the eyes of a child.

Mum dropped the subject and smiled out a little sigh. "Well, in any case, will you have some squash, Severus?"

He shot Petunia another dark look. "If Lily is having some, I will."

The three of them sat at her mum's kitchen table, drinking squash and eating biscuits like grownups. Severus warmed under Lily's regard. Petunia watched as he hung on her sister's every word, not knowing why it bothered her so much.

Later that year, Lily got her Hogwarts letter. Of course Lily would be the one who could do magic. Her parents all but cried with joy that their perfect darling was a witch.

A day or two later, Severus Snape announced with shy pride that he, too, had received his letter. For a week after, Petunia had watched the skies for these strange birds, waiting for her letter to arrive, but it had not. Petunia could not understand it. Academically she was smarter than Lily; all the teachers said so.

Shortly after the letter arrived, an old Scottish witch came to the house, explaining the strange and wonderful world of Wizarding Britain, using exotic words like 'Wizengamot' and 'Transfiguration' and 'Muggle.' When Petunia asked if her letter had possibly got lost in the mail, the old woman had given her a pitying look.

"Our letters don't get lost, dear," she said in a voice that was meant to be kind, but Petunia knew she was being patronised. "It's not something that happens to everyone," the Scottish witch added, her broad accent as rough as a cat's tongue. With an air of regret, she shrugged apologetically. "I'm sorry my dear, but Lily is magical, and sadly, you are not."

Their parents were so proud when they came home from Diagon Alley, sporting cauldrons and wands and things for which Petunia had no name. All through August she would catch Lily and Severus whispering together, sneaking glances her way, sharing some secret that would never include her. Late at night, when everyone was asleep, she tried with all her might to do magic. Why should it touch Lily...even Severus Snape...but pass her by?

The night before she was to leave for Hogwarts, Lily told her how sorry she was that they wouldn't be going to Hogwarts together. Something in her voice told Petunia she was not sorry at all. "You don't mean it!" she hissed, and pinched Lily hard enough to make her cry. In the dark, listening to Lily's quiet sniffing, Petunia let her own tears come.

She went with her parents to London to see Lily off, not because she wanted to, but because she wanted to see if Severus had truly got his letter as well. Sure enough, he was there, waiting alone, standing apart as usual; a dark little sprite among laughing, excited children. His school robes were as ragged and patched as an old doll's, but his eyes dared anyone to challenge his right to be there.

His eyes lit up as Lily ran toward him. Petunia watched with a horrid lump in her throat as Lily looped her arm companionably through Severus', and they boarded the train without a backward glance.

Her mother cried on the way home. "Easy, Cordelia," her da had said, passing her mother a hankie. "It's not like she'll never come home again. Our Lily'll be back for Christmas holiday before you know it."

"She's not 'our Lily' anymore," Petunia had said coldly. "She belongs to *them* now. She'll never be one of us again."

Her parents looked at her blankly, then at one another, and her mother started crying again.

All through that first strange autumn, sleeping alone in the room she had always shared with Lily, Petunia found herself wondering if Severus had somehow been a catalyst for Lily's magic; that bringing home the strange boy with the dark, unsettling eyes had jump-started this dormant ability. And more to the point, Petunia wondered if things would have been different if she had met Severus first.

Petunia grew to despise her parents' fawning pride for the daughter that went to the 'special school up north.' Sometimes when Lily came home for Christmas or summer hols, Severus would be in tow, but he, like Petunia, seemed to belong somewhere in Lily's background, a dark canvas as counterpoint to her bright, flowering beauty. Sometimes, while Lily was thrilling her parents with some elaborate tale of magical adventure, Petunia would glance around and see Severus watching Lily with the same covetous jealousy she felt herself.

Lily no longer pretended to care much about either of them, except when it gave her a chance to somehow make herself look good. When Petunia told her that she had been rewarded for having the highest score on her maths final, Lily replied in a sweetly cloying voice, "Oh, that's so *nice*, Tuney." Then she turned away and proceeded to regale her family with the feathers she had levitated and the potions she had made and the teacups she had conjured and the mice she had transfigured into water goblets, and their parents listened in fearful fascination.

As the years passed, Lily became a stranger to her and their parents, a beautiful girl with an air of superiority. Petunia watched the puzzled excitement in her mum's eyes change to something strained and fearful. That was when magic turned into a black glamour in Petunia's mind, something that shouldn't be encouraged.

Lily hugged their father as soon as she got off the train. "I'm starving, Da! Can we get something to eat?" she said breezily as they walked down King's Cross station.

"Not in London, love," her father said, putting his arm around her. "Your mum's cooking the welcome home feast."

He wheeled her luggage trolley as Lily waved goodbye to her friends. Petunia, who had been forced by their mother to ride shotgun to the station to keep her father out of the pubs, glanced around the platform. "And where's your shadow?"

Lily gave her a puzzled look. "What shadow?"

"Your boyfriend, Severus Snape."

Lily's bright face darkened. "He isn't my boyfriend!" She frowned to herself. "He's in another House."

She gave Petunia a 'leave it alone' look that only ticked her off. "That never stopped you two before," she insisted. "I thought he was your best mate."

"I said I don't want to talk about him!" Lily said sharply. "Mardy old ghoul, always skulking around, spying on me."

"You've changed your tune," Petunia remarked, but Lily was already moving on.

"Would you mind if one of my housemates comes around sometime this summer, Da?" Lily asked. "His name is James Potter, and I'd like you to meet him."

Their father gave her a knowing look. In a broad Irish brogue he replied, "Bringing a bye home to meet mither and da now, is it? And shall I be asking this foine lad his intentions?"

Lily laughed, a bright sound like sunshine flashing through trees. "No!" she answered with mock scorn. "He's almost as big a toerag as Severus." Her face coloured a bit. "He just mentioned he might stop by this summer, that's all."

As Lily and their father chatted and walked, Petunia glanced around at the boisterous students still streaming from the Hogwarts train. A tall boy stepped down from the last carriage, giving his too-long black hair an impatient toss. He turned her way, and Petunia's step faltered. It was Severus Snape.

Sometime in the past year, he had become a man. He was still dressed as poor as a church mouse, but he was vastly different. He gazed about him, wary and sullen, and met her eyes. There was new power there she had never seen before. It was hot and restless and so intense it made Petunia's heart beat queerly with both revulsion and attraction. It made her skin want to crawl right off her body, and yet, and yet...

At that moment, she heard Lily call her name. "Tune! Come on! I'm starving!"

Petunia reluctantly turned to rejoin her family. When she looked back, Severus was watching Lily, and in his face Petunia saw the same hopeful longing she felt herself. Suddenly she hated her sister, hated Lily for owning everything worth having in the world, including this boy's flashing, heated gaze.

The summer she turned eighteen, Petunia was finished with school, and the June air that year was hot and bright. She was walking down the High Street with her friend Jean, laughing and giggling with the careless boredom that girls that age seem to wear like the summer sandals on their feet. They weren't buying anything: window shopping was free, and Biba had a dead cool caff where could they could pool their pocket money and share a cuppa and a bun, sitting among the joss ticks and satin pillows.

Jean paused at the shop's front window, where a mannequin modeled a flowing, turquoise dress. "Look at that lovely frock!" she moaned. "If only Mum would give me my birthday money early, I'd walk in right now and buy it off the rack so fast, the dummy would be naked in the window!"

Petunia giggled at Jean's pronouncement (she was a bit thick). From behind her she heard a scoffing snort. "Dummy? How would you be able to tell which was which?"

Both girls turned, but Petunia knew who it was before she even clapped eyes on him.

His black hair was long and greasy, and his whip-thin face was pocked with fading acne scars. Squinting in the back smoke of his Benson and Hedges, he was dressed like a typical Manc greebo, tricked out in faded black from head to toe in spite of the heat. He looked like trouble, but Petunia wasn't all that sure she was put off by that. Something in his gaze woke something in her, a hot defiance and power that made her heart clip along at a sharper, more focused rate, like a racehorse champing at the bit in the starting gate.

"Are you speaking to us?" Petunia challenged in her most imperious voice. Jean merely stared at him, as if daring him to say anything else.

Severus tilted his head like a bird. *More like a vulture*, Petunia thought. Instead of replying, he made an indifferent shrug, then focused on her breasts. Her entire body grew cool in spite of the heat—except, of course, where his eyes burned the tips of her small, hard nipples.

"You've got an appointment, Jean," he said, apropos of nothing.

For a moment, neither moved. Then Jean blinked and in a surprised, far-away voice, she said, "I've got to go. I have an appointment." She left without another word.

Petunia stared at Severus in shock. "You made her leave! You used magic on her!"

Severus took another deep drag on his cigarette. "What if I did?" he drawled. In spite of his pretended indifference, Petunia could hear pride in his voice.

"You'll get in trouble," she said, but it was an automatic reply. She was wondering how someone like Severus Snape got away with magic when it seemed so almightily important that these Wizarding freaks control their kids so much. "Lily says your people forbid underage wizards to do it."

"They do, but I'm of age now," he said confidently. "Besides, what do you care? According to Lily, you won't even let her say the 'M' word around you." He jeered, "Still jealous because your Hogwarts letter got lost in the mail?"

"As if I'd want to have anything to do with you and Lily and your circus of freaks up at that school!" she retorted, smarting. How dare he throw that back into her face! "And it's none of your business what Miss Perfect Lily says to me," she continued, then got in a dig of her own. "You're not exactly on her dance card anymore."

His ugly face flushed with anger. Then, as suddenly as it flared, it was gone, replaced with a calculating look. He glanced around them, then moved in closer, forcing her to take a step back against the alley wall. "You know, the only reason I made Jean leave is so I could be alone with you."

Petunia stared at him for a long time, trying to read his expression. He was watching her closely, a slight smile on this face. "Why?"

He laughed, a rusty sound that chilled her. "Why?" he barked incredulously. He laughed again, rolling his eyes. "Do I have to draw you a picture *Tune*?"

Shocked and unnerved, Petunia said the first words that popped into her head. "Don't call me that stupid nickname! I detest it!"

Severus shrugged, even as he herded her toward the damp brick wall. "Have to call you something, and I don't think Petunia quite works for you."

She gave him her best withering look, the impact of which was rather lessened by her continuous retreat toward the alley. "As if I care what you call me."

He took another deep drag of his ciggie before tossing it in the gutter. Smoke flumed from his large nostrils like a dragon. "I suppose I'll call you ... Pet, then," he said, his voice smoke-stained and richly deep for a boy. He stepped forward, herding her until she was touching the wall. Her heart was pounding, and she wanted to both run away and ... Oh, she didn't know. She didn't know what she wanted to do. Maybe she wanted *him* to tell her what to do.

He moved closer until their bodies were touching. "Don't," she whispered, but her voice shook and held no authority he would acknowledge. He ran his long fingers up her bare arm, his eyes following the trail of his hand and the gooseflesh that pebbled in its wake.

"Pets are supposed to mind their masters, you know." His voice was as soft as a snake's hiss. "Are you the type of pet that obeys, or the kind that likes to be bad?" He ground his sharp, slim hips against hers; she could feel his hard length pressed against her belly. "Why don't you show me how bad you can be, Pet, and I'll spank you until you're good?"

"As if you could, Severus Snape," she gasped, her voice a shaking whisper. He placed his hands flat against the wall on either side of her head, and swooped down on her like a hawk dropping on a dove.

It was swift and revolting and delirious, like being kissed by a thunderclap full of heat lightning and ozone. He thrust his tongue into her mouth, tasting of burnt tobacco and something sweet. Petunia was not an experienced kisser, and she thought Severus might not be either, but it didn't quell the drenching ache that bloomed from her stomach. It was like a deep breath and a scratched itch, followed by a hatred and a longing for both. Her hips felt disjointed and loose, like a sponge saturated with hot liquid.

She was unaware of her tight grip on his arms, nor the way her hips canted against his; only that he had awakened something within her that was awful and needful and inarticulate. He made a soft, moaning sound in her mouth, and his frantic grinding steadied a little, as if some male hunger inside him had at least been *promised* a good meal.

Finally, he pulled away from her, and she made a harsh, gulping, sobbing sound when he released her. As he reared back, his dark eyes flashing rank, sulphurous fire, she wiped her mouth, sickened and flustered at the expanding feeling in her ribs. With unnerving speed, he raised his hand, and she cowered back. His brows furrowed in dawning understanding, and he looked almost guilty. He flicked a stray strand of hair from her brow with his upraised hand.

"Don't be afraid of me," he said, his voice oddly wooden. Then something malicious and joyful replaced the uncertain look, and he smirked down at her. "You really ought to lighten up, Pet. Take a leaf out of Little Sister's book. She isn't nearly so uptight about kissing."

The twisted, expansive feeling in Petunia's chest collapsed, and was replaced by a hateful humiliation. "Perhaps I have higher standards than she does!" she hissed.

He laughed again, but this time the sound had a brittle, hard gleam in it. "Well, thank you ever so much for lowering your standards just for me." He turned. "See you around, Pet."

He seemed to melt away like the smoke of his cigarette, and as she leaned against the wall, Petunia heard a voice call her name.

"Petunia Evans?" She whirled around and saw one of her dad's mates from the mill. She made herself say hello to him and even smiled at his clumsy attempt to flirt with her. Finally she excused herself, saying she was on her way to see a friend. Dennis gave her a strange look, then bid her a quick goodbye. Petunia sagged in relief as she watched him go.

She walked around the rest of the afternoon in a queer daze. She felt soiled and weary. She felt like something inside her was waking for the first time, something ~~it~~ awakened, and part of her knew she shouldn't feed it. And yet, and yet—

It wasn't on her way, but she found herself walking toward the poor end of town, where ~~he~~ lived. Spinner's End, a run-down street grouted with soot and bad smells. Even as her feet took her toward the house she knew to be his, she told herself she was just bored and with nothing to look forward to, but that was a lie.

Petunia frowned to herself. Besides, if she went home now she would no doubt run into Lily, giggling and putting on her makeup and getting ready to go out with that jerk James Potter. Lily would say something to the effect of, "Don't you have a date tonight, Tuney?" knowing full well Petunia did not. And then Lily would give her that look their parents found so bloody endearing, and mum would no doubt say how *sweet* Lily was to care about her older sister, when all along it was just an acceptable form of smug bragging. *I have a steady boyfriend and you don't.*

Severus may have been Lily's best mate when they were children, but she had thrown him aside like an old smelly rag fast enough when James Potter crooked his finger at her. If Petunia had given a toss, she could have told Severus he was doomed from the start. Lily had ever been afraid of anything that might rub off on her—dirt, germs, bad luck. Like Petunia, Severus was one of the ugly and bitter ones; *and* he was poor to boot. Lily avoided those things as if they were catching. Besides, their parents considered their golden girl far too good for the likes of him, the son of the 'Sniping Snapes.' All the magic he possessed wasn't enough to rid him of that taint.

Then Petunia remembered the way Severus had looked at her, the urgent, sardonic heat in his eyes, the fumbling, brutal kiss that she could still feel pressing her lips against her teeth. She shook her head in anger. Why, he's just one of Lily's cast-offs!

He was standing against the low garden wall surrounding his dingy house, as if he had been waiting for her. He pushed himself off the wall. "Want to come in? Me da's at the pub, mum's visiting a friend in Ipswich." The sardonic sneer was gone, and he looked young and vulnerable. "I'm not going to bite, you know."

When she hesitated, he shrugged. "Have it your way, then," he said, and turned to leave.

"Yes." The word was out of her mouth before she could stop herself. What was she doing? "I...I want to come in." He turned back to her, and in that unguarded moment he looked almost grateful. It was because of this look that she followed him indoors, not the one he gave her later, the one that made her feel strangely warm and a little unwell.

Later she remembered only stark, isolated images, like Polaroid photos. The house was dim and smelled of cigarette smoke and cabbage. Severus made her tea. It was weak and the milk tasted on the turn, but she drank it. He watched her but didn't drink himself.

He led her upstairs, and she followed, looking behind her, feeling that she might get caught any minute. Severus' room was small and cluttered and smelled exactly like what she imagined a boy's room would smell like—musky and earthy, like corn shucks.

She was shaking as he undressed her, and when he slid his fingers between her legs, her knees buckled. He silently urged her down onto his messy bed. Petunia closed her eyes while he undressed and lay on top of her. He sucked her nipples hard, making a small soft moaning sound, and the ache between her legs became too much to pretend she didn't want what was going to happen.

She could never say he took her virginity by force, but she was never sure she could say she gave it up willingly either. The only thing she could say with any conviction was that, by the time he murmured, "You're a very good, Pet," and pushed her legs apart, she was panting, her nipples stinging from his biting, sucking kisses, her cunt slick and hot and needing something.

He lined up his cock to her entrance like a nocked arrow, long and sharply pointed. "Have you done this before?" he gasped, swallowing hard. He was heavy on her, and though she felt she couldn't back out now, she was afraid.

She shook her head, and replied, "You?"

He laughed shortly. "Yeah," he said, and thrust. They both made a pained sound when he plunged inside her.

In eight hard, sharp thrusts, he uttered a guttural, helpless cry of absolute ecstasy and spilled into her. It was over sooner than she would have liked, but with a boy's stamina, he had her twice more before she glanced at the fading light and said, "I have to go. My folks will be worried about me."

He lay on the bed, smoking, as she dressed. He watched her through slitted, drowsy eyes, but his expression was appreciative. Petunia's body felt bruised and sloppy, as if it belonged to someone else. She stopped dressing and said, "Why are you looking at me that way?"

The open, considering look disappeared, and he was the same guarded boy she had always known. "I was just thinking how strange this afternoon has been," he said conversationally. "I went down the High Street to nick a packet of fags and ended up fucking Lily Evans' sister."

She turned away. "So how do I compare?" she asked flippantly, and the moment the words were out of her mouth she wished them back. But why else had she come here, to this inevitable conclusion, if not because she wanted something Lily didn't have?

He rose to his feet with eerie speed and pulled her close. He smelled of sweat and semen and her. "Compared to Lily? You were alright. She was more adventurous, though." He pretended to consider her. "But that's alright. We have all summer to train you up to be a good and proper little Pet."

She tried to pull away from him, but he stopped her. "What's wrong?" he demanded.

Tears filmed her eyes, and she turned away, feeling cheap and soiled, but not before he saw the look on her face and understood. He sighed, and it was an angry sound. "Hush now. Didn't I make you feel good?"

He leaned in close, just a boy wanting approval, and she wanted to spit in his face, but oh, she couldn't. She just couldn't. Because ~~he~~ had made her feel good. Well, he had made her *feel*. Perhaps he *had* been the catalyst to Lily's magic. Maybe he had been the catalyst to something within her as well. And right up until she had spoiled it by asking him about Lily, she had wanted to stay, even if it meant getting in trouble at home.

Now she couldn't wait to get away from him. Lily had been right. He was trouble. She staggered clumsily as she tried to break his hold, but he wouldn't let her. "Stop being stupid," he said, but there was no real nastiness in his voice. "You asked the question, and I gave you my answer." He put his arms around her. In a strangely soft, entreating voice, he murmured. "But I won't mention Lily again if you won't."

She relaxed a little then, and he nodded, pleased. "I want you to listen to me," he said. She looked at him, and there was a fierce power in his eyes, as if their coupling had infused him with something vital and strengthening. "Things are changing," he continued. "Not just for me, but for all of Wizarding Britain. The ones in charge think they can control me, but I'm going to show them there's more to me than just someone to be used."

Petunia stared at him, confused. "I don't understand."

"You don't have to." He glanced around the squalid room. "I'm not going to live in this shithole the rest of my life. I'm going to be someone. I'll have to work hard to do it, but I know how. I'm not a boy anymore. I'm a man, and you're a woman. And for the likes of us, school's out, Pet. It's our turn to play."

A woman's wedding day is supposed to be the happiest of her life, but Petunia thought that old chestnut might be one of those myths little girls grew up believing, until it was too late and you were walking down the aisle without a clue what to do next.

Playing Wedding Day had been one of her favourite Let's Pretends in the years before Lily left. With a rueful smile, Petunia recalled that for her five-year-old self, finding a groom had not been a necessity to the ceremony; apparently all a girl needed was her trusty bridesmaid.

Solemnly walking down the little path in the back garden, Lily would sing the opening reveille of "Here Comes the Bride." Then Petunia would march laboriously toward the rubbish bins in time with the heavy downbeat. "*HERE* comes the *BRIDE*, *ALL* dressed in *WHITE*." She and Lily would then swap limp bouquets and daisy-chain tiaras and it would be Lily's turn to 'walk down the aisle,' her face grave with responsibility, her elbows sticking out at the sides with perfect, lady-like deportment.

Later, there would be a pretend reception with pretend punch and pretend wedding cake and pretend schmoozing. They had attended an older cousin's wedding and knew how it all went. "Oh, my dear, your dress is *so* lovely," Lily would gush, with precocious earnestness. She drank her pretend tea with her pinky outstretched, the perfect wedding guest. "You *must* give me the name of your seamstress. Our *Julia* would look a right treat in something similar."

Lily had, according to Severus, been married in a Wizarding ceremony, a heathen, pagan ritual that bordered on Satan worship. Severus hadn't said so, but Petunia could guess. There had been no bridesmaid for her; he had told Petunia that much. Then he had looked away and changed the subject.

In the little ante-room of her parent's church, Petunia stood alone. She no longer needed Lily to sing her down the aisle. She didn't need anyone, she told herself. She was, after all, getting everything she wanted. Wasn't she?

Her thoughts nervously ricocheted from one subject to the next with almost frenetic randomness. She tried to calm herself by focusing on her future. She tried to picture the normal little house she would one day own and the normal little children she would raise in her normal, backbone-of-England village, free from the madness of dealing with the strange world Lily had been assimilated into. Free from that sick, disquieting feeling that Lily had abandoned her, just like she had abandoned Severus.

After spending that first afternoon in his sweaty, stifling bedroom, they had met often. Not every week, by any means, but not a month went by that she didn't find herself panting beneath him, caught in the penetrating stare of his black eyes, growing hotter and wetter as he whispered some filth in her ear.

She told herself it was just a diversion; she never even entertained the thoughts of wanting anything steady or permanent with the likes of him. A bit of rough, they called it; and even though it sounded sordid and sleazy, she knew that was all he was—her 'bit of rough'. Even as she and Vernon had met and courted, she would feel that deep ache in her body, and seek Severus out, knowing he could quell that itch.

She had been surprised at his reaction when she told him she was getting married; later she wondered why. He had taken the news in complete silence, then responded with a sneer, "You're harnessing up to Dursley? That great pudding of a boy? Oh, aye, every girl's dream, is our Vernon. Still it's your life, Pet." He had snorted through his long nose. "I suppose there's no accounting for taste. I'm proof of that. Well, good luck with it." He had then turned and slouched away, casually flicking his cigarette into the gutter as if symbolically throwing her away with it. His indifference had stung her, not because he had been so callous about it, but because she had surprised herself. She had *wanted* him to care. Thinking back, she wondered why on earth she ever thought he would.

"Yes, thank you very much, Severus Snape. *It is* my life, and I don't need your permission to live it," she said to the mirror, tossing her head. "You had your chance, and you blew it, so ya boo sucks to you." For good measure, she poked her tongue out at herself. The childish gesture made her laugh, and that thankfully settled her flying nerves back down, like startled birds finally returning onto their familiar perch. She quieted herself by thinking about the young man nervously waiting for her at the altar.

Vernon Dursley, she told herself, may not be the man of every girl's dreams, but she was not every girl. Vernon was solid and reliable and very pragmatic. He offered stability and rationality; most of all, he didn't like 'different' any more than she did. She felt they were very well suited.

"Vernon and I will be very happy," she said, in her best pretend wedding reception voice. "I'm thrilled to be marrying him."

"Good. You just keep telling yourself that, Pet." The deep voice startled her out of her reverie. From the shadows in the corner of the rectory dressing room, Severus's pale face appeared like an apparition. Dressed as he was in black, he looked like a dark angel peering over her shoulder. His body seemed to shimmer with magic, but he looked hard, intractable, as if the last of his boyhood softness had been fired out in some dark kiln.

Looking into his fierce, scowling face, Petunia was struck by the thought that they *looked* so much alike, as if she were his sister, not Lily's. Then he met her eyes with his, and the look on his face was anything but brotherly.

Petunia's body flushed hot, then cold. Every emotion she had ever felt about Severus battled for supremacy: guilt, pleasure, desire, jealousy, greed, regret. They all seemed to ripple from her like waves from a thrown pebble, each bumping into the other and each becoming harder to control and understand as they escaped her grasp. The only one she seemed capable of recognising was a deep, fierce longing.

"What are you doing here?" she whispered, her voice trebly with nerves. She tried to turn and face him, but he put his hands on her shoulders and held her in place, facing the mirror, watching her from behind.

"I came to wish the bride the best of luck," he drawled, gliding his calloused fingers over her bare shoulders. He brushed her veil aside, leaned forward and placed a feathery kiss against the side of her neck. His voice was a lovely, silky whisper. "My invitation must have got lost in the mail."

"After what you said the last time we met, I didn't think you would want—ah—to ... to come," she stammered, as his long fingers cupped her breasts. Against the virginal bodice of her wedding gown, his hands looked dangerous, claw-like and obscene. He squeezed her breasts roughly and pressed against her.

"Oh, I want to come," he replied lewdly, laughing at his own humour. "And so do you."

She gasped in shock. "We can't do this! I'm getting married today," she protested thinly.

"Do tell? Then let's make sure you're truly a blushing bride," he purred, easing the zip of her dress down with deliberation. In the mirror, Petunia watched his eyes following the progress of the zip until it reached the small of her back. Then his gaze rose to meet hers; his eyes gleamed with a hard, flinty light as he pushed the dress from her shoulders. It made a soft, rustling sound as it puddled onto the floor, leaving her standing before him in a white, lacy bra and silk knickers. Severus pulled one of the straps of her suspenders, then released it. It made a stinging slap against her leg, and he smirked.

"Big Vernon's got himself quite a nice package to open tonight," he said playfully. He pulled her back against his body with a low growl of lust. "He'll have you tonight, but

not before I do. And that excites you, doesn't it?"

She should have said no. She should have pushed him away, or done *something*. But her body bloomed with that searing ache that she could not resist. *You're getting married to Vernon*, a feeble little voice whined within.

Severus' smirk grew more confident. "It's impressive, watching you trying to wage war against yourself." Sympathetically, he added, "Accept it, Pet. You're getting wet just thinking about my prick inside you."

Her longing changed to a sick, queasy lust; it fluttered in her head like a captured bird, a panicking thing ready to beat itself to death at the bars of its cage. She looked away before he could see the truth in her eyes. She didn't think she could bear his gloating, triumphant assurance one minute longer.

He gave her an impatient shake. "Oh, no you don't, Pet! Look at me."

She reluctantly obeyed. He glared at her with burning eyes. "Don't pretend you're an innocent party in this. This is your wedding day, and you're in the arms of another man right now. You'll own that as much as I do."

Petunia nodded, stunned by the yearning she saw in his face. It was more than a match for her own, only she was not sure they both yearned for the same thing. That thought alone should have stopped this madness, but it wasn't enough. She dimly realised that very little would be.

Of all the people she had wanted to be here with her today, he had been the only one to step up. He nodded, as if reading her thoughts. His long fingers crept down her belly, and he cupped her mound in his warm palm, his touch gentle, almost respectful. Petunia licked her dry lips as her eyes slid closed. His voice became thick with lust and power. "When I get my hand in your cunt, I know what I'm going to find." He made a humming, purring sound that made her belly quake. "Warm and wet and slick as honey. Does old Vernon know how wet you get when you're horny for a fuck? Does he make you wet like this, Pet? Hmm? Does he make you feel this good?"

"Don't," she groaned as his warm hand pressed against her belly.

"Don't?" He teased, "Oh, no. You don't want this, do you, pretty Pet? You want me to leave?" He moved away, and she gave a little desperate cry. In that moment, pleasure and submission drove everything else from her mind, and she surrendered, wantonly pushing back against the hard length of him like a cat in heat. Severus slipped his hand down the front of her knickers and laughed as her knees buckled.

"That's right. Spread your legs, girl," he commanded, his tone no longer playful. He moaned as his fingers found her shamefully wet.

"Don't talk about ... about him ..."

"No fear on that count, Pet. I came here to fuck you. There's only going to be one man's name on your lips, and it won't be his."

He teased her with the head of his cock, wetting it with her juices, then eased in with such sensual, languorous patience she gave a little sob of helplessness. His large, rough hands gripped her hips, and drew her back against him with a hiss of satisfaction. She pressed her hands against the mirror and arched her back. "Oh, there's a good girl," he purred drunkenly and churned his hips against her arse. "My pretty Pet."

This was not like their meetings in the past...quick, frantic fumbblings in back alleys or his squalid boy's bedroom; this was slow and deep—almost gentle. In the mirror, Petunia watched his reflection. He looked down at the place where they joined, his ridiculously long lashes fluttering like dark wings against his cheek. His mouth was parted, and looked lush and decadent. He took her with agonisingly slow extravagance and patience. He moved inside her with care and attention, sensing her rising orgasm and lifting her up to it like an offering, like a child being lifted up to a parent's kiss.

Petunia spent the last minutes before she walked down the aisle to marry Vernon Dursley shuddering and keening Severus' name, overwhelmed with the physical lust he alchemised from her body.

"That's it," he crooned, as she gasped and moaned and shook. "Come for me, Pet. Let me see it. Let me ~~feel~~ it." He found his rhythm, deep and sure and hard. He growled, "Ah, yeah, that's good. Oh, you're good, aren't you? Aren't you my good little slut, Pet?"

She moaned, and pushed back. He smacked her bottom. "Answer me!"

"Yes!"

"Yes, what? I want to hear it!"

"I'm your good little slut!" she choked. "Yours ..."

Soon his passion rose, and he cast his control aside, replacing it with force. His thrusts grew faster and harder as he demanded her to match and meet the urgency of their coupling. Petunia, lost to him, planted her feet and drove back against him. The hands clamped on her hips tightened almost painfully as he pounded into her.

He gave a sudden, growling snarl, and his hard expression dissolved into a look of such intense, agonised pleasure that in that moment he was the most beautiful thing Petunia had ever seen. Her orgasm rushed into her and through her, and she cried out with each wave of pulsing, breaking ecstasy. It took her deeper and deeper into its depths until it was too much, until she thought she would die of it, until it was all she was and nothing else mattered, not even the next breath.

With a roar, he thrust into her so hard she banged against the mirror. With a final, trembling sigh, he relaxed against her.

For several moments the room was quiet except for their ragged, heavy breathing. Eventually Severus hitched in a final deep breath, and released it like a satisfied sigh. "I've always wondered what it would be like to have bride on her wedding day, Pet," he whispered in her ear.

Even though his words had a bright, false ring to them, they were like a bucket of cold water thrown into her face, dousing her lust and filling her with shame. But more than decency, more than propriety, it was the face of Lily that came with his vainglorious confession. She pushed him away with a snarl. "Oh, really?" she said coldly, hating the ugly tone of her voice. "And here I thought you were just comparing notes again. You mean precious Lily didn't favour you with a quick pre-wedding bunk-up?"

He started as if she had struck him, and the look of fury in his eyes sharpened his features into hawkish cruelty. Petunia didn't care; he had stolen her virginity, and now he'd stolen her wedding day.

No. He hadn't stolen them. She had given them away to this twisted, malevolent creature.

She turned away, leaned against the mirror and burst into tears, smearing her makeup as she sobbed. The glass was cold against her wet, feverish cheeks, and she wished with all her might she could simply melt into the mirror and let it lock her humiliation away in a timeless forever, like a scarab encased in amber. And that's when she knew. She now understood the look of triumph during the final, punishing thrusts as he rode out his climax; he *wanted* her to feel this way. He had been looking for some kind of revenge, and he'd found it.

"Why?" she whined at last.

Severus looked at her with bemused puzzlement. "What sort of question is that? Why what?"

She spluttered, but could not make herself reply. *Why do you make it so difficult? Why couldn't it be you instead of Vernon?*

Why does everything have to come down to comparing me with Lily?

When she didn't continue, Severus sighed, then tilted his head. "You have a wedding to attend in a few minutes. You need to compose yourself." Another sigh, and this one had a timbre of remorse in it. "Come on, Pet. Pull yourself together."

It was that tone of penitence that eventually pulled her back from the brink of hysteria. She managed to stop crying and mop up her makeup. She blew her nose while he lazily lit a cigarette. She tried to pick up her dress and move past him, but he stopped her with one wiry, strong arm. She looked up into those dark, mocking eyes; they drilled into her mind like acid, and for a moment she felt guilty for all the wrong reasons. And who did this guilt serve? Certainly not Vernon.

In the low, silky voice she heard in her dreams, Severus said, "I don't think we'll be nearly as ashamed of this as we should be. I know I won't. I came here to wish you luck with Dursley." His eyes grew cloudy. "But when I saw you, I knew I couldn't leave without having you. Do you believe me?"

She stared at him stupidly, and he laughed. "Now, you will do as I say. You won't touch so much as a bathing flannel, or chew so much as a breath mint. You won't wash yourself. You will get dressed, and you will walk down the aisle with my spunk running down your legs." He gave her a wolfish smile and stroked her arm with the tips of his fingers. Softly, he purred, "And tonight in the Honeymoon Suite, when old Vernon's sweating all over your tits and hitting the vinegar strokes without you, *if* he's still sober enough, I want you to remember what we did. Not Lily and me. *You* and me. Because while you're in your wedding bed, I'll be thinking about you in that wedding dress, and I'll wank while I'm thinking about the taste of you in my mouth."

He kissed her then, a clumsy, heated kiss that should have happened at the beginning, not now. It tasted of alcohol and cinnamon and sated lust. Leisurely, as if he had all night, he pulled away from her lips and took a step back. He graced her with a smile that carried no hint of sardonic conquest.

He raised his wand toward her, and she instinctively flinched. He rolled his eyes, then muttered something she didn't understand. A tingle of what felt like electricity ran over the surface of her skin, making her gasp and shiver. Then she was completely dressed again—not a hair out of place, not a single mascara-lined eyelash so much as smudged.

There was a knock on the door of the dressing room, and she gave a startled little *yip* that sounded childish and simpleminded. Severus' shoulders hitched with silent laughter.

"Petunia?" a muffled voice called from the other side. "It's time to go, dear."

"Alright. I'm ready," she said, and was surprised to find that she was. She turned toward Severus, but he was already gone. Only the fading curl of cigarette smoke remained.

Harry had been left behind on their doorstep like the runt in a litter of strays, with nothing more than a rambling and incomprehensible note from Albus Dumbledore telling her that she was responsible for his welfare from now on. Not so much as tuppence mentioned with regards to his upkeep.

The first time Petunia laid eyes on the skinny, scrawny thing, ugly and scarred, he stared up at her with Lily's eyes.

"Mummy?" he enquired, and held out his hands to be picked up.

"No!" She snapped, unnerved at the bright green eyes staring up at her quizzically. "I'm not your mother," she added vehemently. She turned to her own child, all plump and delectable, sucking on his little fat fist, and her voice melted like sugar into sweet entreaty. "Who am I, Duddikins? Who's Mummy, sweetums?"

He blatted and happily broke wind. Vernon, still repulsed by the new little interloper and the disturbing letter they had received, pinched his own son's cheek with more force than he should. Dudley shrieked. Petunia picked him up to cuddle him, while Harry watched, tears welling in Lily's eyes. "Mummy? Mummy?"

Petunia allowed Dudley to wail all the way to the babysitter's house so she wouldn't have to listen to that politely questioning voice.

"Mummy? Mum?"

Vernon didn't want to go to the funeral, but convention dictated that Petunia had to. Besides, she knew Severus would be there. She herself required no consolation. Lily had made her bed, and now she was lying in it. Why they had been saddled with this unwanted and unnecessary child of her sister's was what Petunia really wanted to know.

The funeral was at their parents' church in Manchester. Petunia hadn't been back since her wedding two years before. She hadn't seen Severus in all that time, either. She told herself she would not look for him, but of course she had. She spotted him as the family walked into the chapel, his messy, unkempt black hair clean and combed for once. He was looking at the coffin, a pale, thin almost-man in a too-big suit that probably belonged to his da. His ugly face was paper-white and creased with sorrow; he looked much older than she knew him to be. As she walked by, his dark eyes flicked up at her, and there was no fire in them, none of the twisted, dark glamour that awed and excited her.

Where was the boy who was going to make something great of himself? Where was the all-powerful wizard he had bragged he was on his way to becoming? At that moment, she wondered what on earth she had ever seen in him.

Later, at her da's old local, she and Vernon were sitting with his friends, having a drink, when Severus walked in. He ordered a pint of bitter at the bar, then turned around, scanning the room with his panther's eyes.

Jean Bellfield pointed at Severus. "Isn't that the little Snape oik who used to hang around our Lily?" She scoffed. "What a dreadful scruff! You'd think he could have shown some proper respect and got a haircut at least."

Petunia opened her mouth to answer when Vernon broadsided her, his malty breath stinging her nose.

"Tuney, be a love and gis another pint, that's a girl," he said, pressing a pound note into her hand and patting her shoulder with a little too much inebriated force. She took the money and pretended a bit of irritation, but went to the bar and stood by Severus.

"A pint of lager, please," she requested primly. She glanced to her left, where Severus stood with his back to the bar, leaning against it with his elbows. Quietly, she said, "I didn't think you'd come."

His eyes, bleak and miserable, swiveled toward her, and he took another long pull on his pint. "I had to," he said, his voice low and lifeless.

Vernon's pint arrived, but Petunia didn't want to leave the bar just yet. Casting about for a reason to stay, she asked, "So, what are you doing now?"

He winced, as if the question was unpleasant to him. "I'm going to start teaching at Hogwarts next term."

Petunia was startled into laughter. "You, a teacher? I just can't imagine—"

"Oh, I'm sure you can't. Imagination was never your long suit, Pet," he snapped. Heat flared into his eyes, driving away the dead, lifeless look.

Stung, Petunia picked up the drink and turned to leave, but he touched the hand she had rested on the bar. She looked up into his miserable face. "I'm sorry, Pet," he said, sounding near tears. "That was uncalled for." He managed a small ironic smile. "You're right. I'll probably make a wretched teacher."

She didn't reply; she didn't know what to say to this version of Severus. Finally, she nodded. "I need to get back—"

"Meet me tonight."

The breath left her body. "I don't think I can."

"You can. You have to." He looked down on her, so tall she felt like a child masquerading in her mother's black dress. "You want to. I know you do." He caught her hand in a tight grip, as if to keep her there. "I need you tonight, Pet. I'm afraid ..." He stopped, then whispered with the stunned sorrow of a child, "I need to look into someone's eyes who doesn't hate me. Please."

It occurred to her that he might use those liquid, expressive eyes without compunction to get his way, but she didn't think he was doing it now. In any case, it didn't stop her from falling into them. Caught in their naked fragility, Petunia knew she would do what he asked.

Later in the evening, while her husband and their friends drank themselves into a dastardly stupor, she excused herself to go to the ladies'. In a dark alcove at the end of the hall, Severus pressed her against the wall, and put his arms around her. She held him as he impaled her on his hard, sharp cock.

At the moment of her desperate, guilty climax, she felt him, alive and pulsing and thrumming with life, and she cried out, happy to be alive with him and—

The hands around her waist gripped hard, and Severus moaned like a trapped animal, a sound of complete and bottomless hurt. She looked up into his stricken, streaming eyes, and saw the boy that Lily had brought home, dirty and miserable and just glad to be someplace that wasn't Spinner's End. She had never seen anyone look so lost and alone.

"Pet," he sobbed, and the word was an apology. She could hear it, could see it in his face.

When his breathing slowed, and the grief had passed, Severus cupped her face and wiped away the tears Petunia had not been aware she was crying. When she began to tremble, he kissed her tiredly. "Go on back to your friends, Pet. You're shaking like a leaf."

When she hesitated, he gave her a crooked smile. "I'll call on you."

"Yes."

His red-rimmed eyes met hers. "I'll call on you. Because you need me, too."

It was easier to get away while both boys were young. Babysitters were cheap, and Petunia had plenty of excuses.

"Does he suspect anything?"

They lay side by side in a narrow hotel bed. The sheets were cheap and scratchy, the air smelling of stale cigarettes and damp. He ran the tip of his wand over her white thighs, leaving little sizzling trails of heat behind.

"I don't want to talk about it."

"I don't believe your wants have anything to do with the question, Pet," he rumbled smugly. With each pass, the tip of the wand grew closer and closer to her mons. The heat grew more intense.

She closed her eyes and turned away. "No. And he won't. He—" she began, then stopped.

The wand grew closer. "He what?" Severus asked, his voice a maddening, careless drawl.

"He—he doesn't see me like that."

She forced herself to open her eyes and look at Severus, his head propped up on his hand, looking down at her. "Has he ever, Pet?" he asked solemnly. There was tenderness behind it that she wanted to be grateful for. Something in his expression whispered, *like I do?*

She shook her head, angry at the self-pity that welled in her heart. "No. Never."

"More fool he, then." He drew the tip of that black stick up her cleft, and the pleasure flooding her body at that moment was unbearable, almost excruciating. He put his hand over her mouth and whispered, "Now scream when you come."

She did.

On the day Harry received his Hogwarts letter, everyone was at home; it was a Bank Holiday, and they had plans to drop Harry off at Mrs Figg's before taking Dudley to the shops. Petunia saw the tawny owl, saw the letter, and felt light-headed. She galloped into the hall, racing to be the first to retrieve the familiar-looking envelope, when she saw Dudley snatch it from Harry's hand and declare, "Harry's got a letter! Harry's got a letter!"

She nearly tore her own son's hand off his wrist (*her own son's*) to take the letter away. "Give me that!" she snapped, ignoring Dudley's surprised face. With shaking hands she glanced at the front of the envelope, trying to think of at least one plausible reason she could give as to why she should receive such a strange-looking envelope. When she saw the words, *Harry Potter, The Cupboard Under the Stairs*, she turned the letter over. It was official Hogwarts stationery.

Then her relief turned to anger. She should have known that bloody school would send her sister's brat an invitation to attend. All the jealousy and inadequacy burned in her as brightly as it had when she was a little girl. And hadn't little Miss Perfect Lily been *SO* sympathetic and smug when no letter came for Petunia?

She had found a way to pay back Dumbledore for rejecting her all those years ago...by keeping the boy so isolated he would never even *know* about the Wizarding world. And now they wanted him anyway. She'd have a word with Severus, and tell him to remove Harry's name from the roll! Savagely, she thought: *that will show them!* If she couldn't go, then Lily's brat wouldn't go, either!

Then her malicious joy faded. Severus still loved Lily; Petunia had never been more than a substitute, she knew that. The living, fucking replacement for what Severus could never have.

With an angry growl, she tossed the letter into the fire. Later, she could never decide whether or not she was relieved or disappointed it hadn't been for her, for much different reasons than when she was younger.

A week after school actually started, Petunia managed to get away from her recovering husband and son to meet with Severus. He had heard a great deal of what had happened, of course. "It's been the talk of Wizarding Britain," he said, sourly, drinking a glass of wine. "The Boy Who Lived, come to Hogwarts." He cast his dark, bitter eyes toward the fireplace. "They speak of him as if he's already the gods' gift to the world."

Petunia liked the dry, dismissive tone in his voice. "He's a complete waste of time and education," she said petulantly, glad to be able to talk about her shiftless nephew. "The apple doesn't fall far from the tree," she added triumphantly. "I knew! I told you she was making a mistake, marrying that good-for-nothing Potter—"

Severus grabbed her hair, and forced her down onto her knees. "You're hurting me," she whined, excitement rolling through her.

Severus glared down at her. "Tell me something, Pet."

She nodded, and he tightened his grip on her hair. "I was under the assumption that you enjoyed our little assignments. Was I incorrect?"

He was almost holding her too tightly to move, but she managed to shake her head.

"Good." He released her, then stepped back. "If you wish to continue our liaisons, I will thank you to ~~never~~ mention James Potter or your sister to me ever again. Is this understood?" His voice was like a roaring wave, pounding over her, and even as she cringed away from him, she wanted him.

"I promise," she whined, terrified he would leave. She crawled to him like an animal. "Severus..." she began, looking up at him pleadingly. The anger bled from his eyes, and was slowly replaced with simmering lust. He gazed down at her with narrowed, smoldering eyes. With deliberate slowness, he stepped up to her until his crotch was inches away from her face. His fingers corded through her hair, and tipped her head back, forcing her to look up at him.

With a secret smile, he purred, "You may take this opportunity to redeem yourself."

Her fingers trembled as she swiftly unfastened his trousers.

While Vernon was busy slaking his thirsty ambition and Dudley too grown up to suffer her smothering brand of motherhood, Petunia settled into a stable, if uninspiring existence with her husband. They had not shared 'carnal relations,' as she thought of it, in years. While his lusts tended towards those of social position and the table, Petunia still felt the baser drives of her own body. Severus always seemed to feel them as well, as if her most insatiable needs were manipulated by the same pulling moon that led him to her.

It was always the same. His owl would arrive during the day, when no one was at home but her. She would tear open the letter, excited and terrified. There would be instructions, a location, a date and time. Occasionally there would be a Portkey. She loathed the abominable things, but that didn't stop her from using them.

Sometimes there were presents, garments he wanted her to wear. Wanton, whorish, cheap nylon things; skimpy, scratchy, chosen for their very seediness, she suspected. She felt sordid just trying them on, but wore them nevertheless.

The spring Dudley finished Smeltings, Severus actually came to her at Privet Drive. He showed up at the house while Vernon and Dudley were at some Father-Son camping trip Grunnings hosted every year. He had been in a strange mood since Christmas, and their few encounters had taken on a frantic, almost panicked feel. And now this, his first visit to her home.

His hair was stringy and unkempt, his sallow face looked exhausted, but his eyes were the same: black, snapping with arrogance and that indefinable knowledge that he held over her, as if he was both intimidated and enamoured of her all at once.

When he showed up on her doorstep, her eyes crawled over him greedily. He was wearing plain black woolen trousers and an old linen shirt that had seen better days. The sleeves were rolled up to just below his elbows, starkly showing off the black tattoo Lily had tried to warn her about but which now Petunia ignored. She was too busy looking at his hands. Those big hands with long fingers. Dirt under the nails. Powerful, sensitive—elegant in their own way. They made her skin crawl and grow hot with arousal all at once. She could smell his spicy cologne and cigarette smoke, smells that were only his. She became consciously aware she was bunching the skirt of her dress in her hands almost convulsively.

Severus regarded her silently, then sneered, "Can't wait to get out of that mumsey frock, can you, Pet?" He jerked his head upward, a commanding motion. "Go on, then. Lift it up." He gestured lewdly with his fingers. "I gave you instructions."

"Yes." Her throat was dry; all the moisture in her body was down deep, in that secret place.

He tilted his head, like a teacher regarding a dimwitted student. "Well? I'm waiting. Let's see what I came for."

His black, unholy eyes stayed locked with hers as she raised her skirt. Her heart was pounding so hard she was almost panting. His eyes flicked toward her bared, shaven cunny, then back up to her face, and he nodded. A pleased look of power flashed in his expression. "Good girl," he purred, but his tone sounded as if he thought her anything but.

One large hand drifted to his crotch, and Petunia moaned as he stroked his obvious erection through his trousers. The impatient, troubled look on his face slackened; there was a drunken, hazy light in his eyes. Suddenly, he held out his arms in a demanding, pulling gesture. "Come to me." His voice was slurry, as if she'd intoxicated him with her obedience, and the idea that she might have some measure of power over him thrilled her. Like a moth to a candle's glow, she went to him. His arms went around her in a possessive, greedy rush, and she nearly swooned.

Later, in her husband's bed, Severus ordered her to play with herself while he unbuttoned his trousers and took himself in hand. Petunia frantically rubbed her secret place, and a foolish, weak sound escaped her as he loomed over her, still stroking his cock. It was a ponderous, bulbous, sightless monster that she could taste for days after he finished off in her mouth. She had missed it now that their meetings were so infrequent.

She allowed him to turn her around until she was on her hands and knees. He roughly pushed her head down and flipped her wide skirt up almost over her head. He was rough, kneading and pushing her bum cheeks apart, and she was both excited and ashamed at the noises she was making.

A sharp slap made her cry out. "Oh, yeah," he whispered, his husky voice obscenely erotic. "Let me spank you."

"Yes," she rasped, almost mindless with lust. "Do it. Just, please, please ..."

Throughout that long afternoon, he fucked her, and spanked her, and whispered his filthy commands into her ear. He thrust his cock into her mouth until she choked on it. And she came, and came, and came again, in the bed she and Vernon shared.

At one point, during his climax, Severus uttered a soft cry, but when she looked into his unhandsome face, his eyes were dry and far away. Afterward, he held her, and when she tried to speak, he shook his head, so she stayed quiet. Gradually, his tight embrace loosened, and his breathing lengthened. For the first time in all the years they had known one another, they fell asleep in one another's arms.

At three in the morning, Petunia awoke to an empty bed. As she blearily stumbled downstairs, stiff and sore and glugged, to put the kettle on, she realised she ~~had~~ been awake when he left. Just barely, though.

She had the vaguest sleepy feeling of his warm, dry mouth pressed against her forehead. Then he had kissed her lips and whispered, "Goodbye, Pet."

Two months later, Petunia overheard Harry call Severus Snape a murderer. According to her nephew, Severus had killed Albus Dumbledore and no one knew where he was, except that he was with the enemy. She didn't want to believe any of it, but as time dragged on and they were forced into hiding, Petunia grew more uncertain as she waited for word from him. None came.

Weeks, then months passed in a foreign place that disagreed with her constitution and complexion, and Petunia replayed their last night together in her mind over and over. Every time she recalled his whispered, "Goodbye, Pet," she shivered, feeling like a goose was walking over her grave. She fretted and watched the skies compulsively, worried that he would be unable to find her. Worried that her nephew had told the truth; worried that she would never see him again.

Often, late at night, lying next to her snoring husband, she asked herself over and over: Why had he chosen that day to come to Privet Drive, and not insist they meet in some cheap hotel? Why hadn't she been awake enough to persuade him to stay longer? Why didn't he contact her now? Why did it matter to her so much? But more than the others put together, she asked the question which had never owned an answer: Why had he said 'Goodbye, Pet'?

He had never said goodbye before.

She lay down on the bed, on her side, and opened the letter with numb fingers. Three yellow pieces of heavy parchment, full of writing, fell onto the bed beside her. Seeing his familiar scrawl made her heart pound like a sledgehammer in her chest.

Pet, I think this might be the last chance I'll have to write you. You see, I don't believe I'm going to be around much longer, and in some ways, that's a relief. I won't go into all the reasons why...you don't want to know and I don't have the time to explain. But there are things I need to say. If this is to be my last confession to you, I want it to be a true one.

My feelings for Lily are the same ones I had the first time I saw her in that park, laughing in the swings. You always thought I saw you as a means of revenge for Lily. In the beginning, that was true enough; I owe you that at least. But I think you saw me in the same way. She was the symbol of perfection you could never attain, and the ultimate woman I could never win.

The truth of the matter is that people like you and me aren't easy to love, Pet, and I think Lily loved us as much as we allowed her to. Real love only comes once to people like you and me. We don't trust it, so we water it just enough so it grows up stunted and sickly. Or worse, we're afraid of it, so we smother and poke and prod it until it eventually dies from too much handling.

I'm sorry, my mind is wandering. I've had very little sleep over the last month or so, and I'm almost done in. What I meant to write about was your wedding day. I went to the church that day to, I don't know, humiliate you, to goad you into telling me to fuck off. I don't even remember why I came. I just know I wanted you to feel as betrayed as I did.

Even though I know you will hate me for saying so, when you told me you were getting married to Vernon, it felt like I was losing Lily all over again. 'It always comes back to Lily, doesn't it?' I can almost hear you saying it as you're reading this.

But the truth is, when I saw you in your beautiful white gown, you looked like some kind of fairy tale princess with your dark hair and white skin. I knew right then Lily had nothing to do with my feelings about you. The pure and simple fact was, and remains, I wanted you. When we were standing there, looking in the mirror, I thought we looked like we belong together.

And while I made love to you that day, I wished I was the one you were marrying. I almost told you, Pet, but then I reverted to type and hurt you because I was hurting. But I'm going to come clean at last, and they say the last time counts for all, don't they?

I lied to you, Pet. I never touched Lily. That day in my parents' house was the first time for me, too. You were the only woman I ever had; you were the only woman I wanted that way. I know I should have stayed away from you but as long as you let me, I had to come to you. I'm sorry that wanting one another wasn't enough for either of us. And even if I could have persuaded you to leave Vernon for me, I wouldn't have done it. You deserve better than the likes of me.

I know I'm damned. I was the one who turned Lily against me, and she never forgave me for it. I even know what my hell will be; an eternity of her indifference and rejection. I deserve that for the part I played in what happened to her.

It's getting late, and I'm so tired I hardly know what I'm writing anymore. But I know this: I am ashamed of so many things I've done, and I know I should feel ashamed of distracting you, keeping you away from your husband and son and the chance of a normal life without magic. But I can't. If there is such a thing as comfort in the hell that awaits me, it will be knowing that in some small way you wanted me as much as I wanted and needed you. So I tried to be what you needed me to be. And it was good, wasn't it? It has been the only good thing in my life since...

No. I won't say that. Lily doesn't get the last word in this, Pet. And the last time counts for all.

I won't blame you if you hate me, but I hope you won't. And I don't blame you if you can't forgive me, but I hope with what is left of my heart that you will, and come to remember me with some fondness.

Be content. Goodbye, Pet.

No Love, Severus, or anything like that at the end. Just his name, signed almost carelessly, as if it didn't matter. And she supposed it didn't. There was no need for him to tell her anything she already knew, and even less reason to lie.

The words "Goodbye, Pet" blurred, doubled, trebled, and melted from her vision in the prism of her tears, then her sobs, then her wails.

She cried until the sun's rays grew long and thin across the bedroom floor; she cried until her pillow was wet. She cried until her head ached and her stomach churned and her chest hitched uncontrollably. She whined his name over and over, like a thwarted child.

As the afternoon faded, her storm of tears blew itself out, more from exhaustion than relief. She shakily folded the pages back into the envelope, her movements slow and gentle, like a mother tucking her baby in bed.

She lifted her heavy, clogged head from the pillow, and glanced at the clock. Vernon would be home in an hour. It took her ten minutes to get to her feet. She blew her nose, and washed her face. She put on a fresh dress, because Vernon liked to see her that way, and made her way downstairs. In the front room she paused and looked around her immaculate home; each item was safe and secure in its allotted place, including her.

She put a gammon steak and roast potatoes in the oven for supper. As she cut little even crosses in her sprouts, each cut of the knife whispered *Severus is dead. Severus is dead. Severus is dead.*

She closed her swollen eyes, and allowed herself to picture him one final time, tall and pale and slender; her secret twin, her dark lover, her bitter half.

He had been a different sort of boy around her. A better sort of boy, even. Perhaps what they had was the best they could ever have hoped for. Petunia had thought it was the one thing Lily could never hold over her. How wrong she had been. *It always comes back to Lily, doesn't it?*

"You were wrong, Severus," she whispered. "Lily does get the last word in this. You belonged to her first, and she claimed you at the last. And last time counts for all."

Petunia laid down the knife, and wondered if she would ever feel truly alive again.