

Siren Song

by Subversa

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Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: This story is a birthday gift for my beloved Keladry Lupin. Happy birthday, dearest I hope this is what you had in mind when you gave me this prompt so long ago.
Hugs

Siren Song

Severus Snape sat on the train, travelling the London Underground, sagging into his seat in abject weariness. Since the time six months before when Dumbledore had fallen from the lightening-struck tower, Severus' life had been an endless parade of dingy rooms, pointless Tube rides, and Death Eater gatherings. Struggling on, walking the fine line which kept him closest to his Master, gathering intelligence, then seeking ways to safely transmit the information where it needed to go, his colourless existence continued. This time of year threw it into particularly bleak contrast to the lives of the other people he saw.

Christmas had ever been a beautiful time of year in Scotland O, Hogwarts! Hogwarts, where the very walls of the ancient castle seemed to revere the turning of the seasons and the special celebrations of the winter solstice! Every year since Severus had been there as a boy, Rubeus Hagrid had fetched enormous evergreens from the Forbidden Forest, which were then hung with living faeries and other magical decorations and displayed about the Great Hall. Dumbledore had adored the holiday with a child's delight, and from his mentor's simple enjoyment, Severus had learnt an appreciation for the Yule celebration although he would never admit it.

The sudden memory of Dumbledore pierced him to the core, as it always did, and he jerked his head away as if touched by fire. The sudden movement brought his head into contact with the window frame and attracted the attention of the surrounding travellers. With a fierce scowl, he dropped his head toward his chest and glared into the gloom about his boot-clad feet.

He had done what he could do to alter his appearance since his flight from Hogwarts the previous summer. The hair he had always worn long was gone; his shaved scalp was most often covered by a dark watch cap. Heavily tinted spectacles covered his eyes and somewhat obscured his nose; a moustache and goatee now covered his mouth and chin. When moving amongst Muggles, he wore their clothing, bringing no attention to himself in his none-too-clean denims and non-descript jumpers bought from charity shops. Today, in deference to the rather chill winter wind, he had added a tatty overcoat to his ensemble.

The train began the long process of braking as it pulled into the Tube station and Severus readied himself to exit. The doors opened automatically and before his feet hit the platform, he heard the enchanting music.

Remus Lupin trudged through the press of people on the Muggle London street, his hands safely tucked into the pockets of his warm coat. Harry had virtually forced the

garment upon him, threatening to go about in the cold without his cloak if Remus failed to accept the gift.

Harry, Ron, and Hermione were in and out of Grimmauld Place and had been since the summer; it was their base camp, from which they sallied forth on the search for the Horcruxes. Their efforts had been successful, overall; Hufflepuff's Cup and Slytherin's locket had been destroyed, thus far.

Now Remus was on a course to cross paths with one of his informants. Severus Snape, Dumbledore's spy, continued to pass intelligence from Voldemort's camp, and Remus was too desperate for all of it to end to reject any source of potentially useful information.

Tonks his adorable, clumsy, beguiling Tonks was determined to be his wife, and he was determined to have her. His only caveat was that Voldemort must fall before they could be married, which tended to heighten his desire to bring about the inevitable confrontation between Harry and the so-called Dark Lord. With such an incentive as Tonks before him, Remus was perhaps more willing to accept the somewhat dubious provenance of Snape's information than another person Harry, for instance might be.

Plunging into the Christmas Eve crowds at the entrance to the Tube station, he headed for the platform Snape had specified. As he paid and passed through the barrier, his ears were delighted with an angel's song.

Near the staircase, with her velvet-lined guitar case open at her feet, stood a young woman, playing a guitar and singing. Her dark hair hung past her shoulders, and her eyes were shining with the joy of the music as her heart-rending contralto ascended in the air of the unlovely station. Her hands moved over the guitar strings, chording and strumming.

The beauty of the seasonal song pulled Remus to her side. As he neared her, he saw that her appealing eyes were blue; she caught his gaze, and for a moment it seemed that she sang directly to him. Remus lifted a hand to his heart, as if to hold the loveliness more closely to him for an instant longer.

The girl with the guitar moved into the instrumental bridge of her song, bending her head for a moment as she played. As Remus watched the dark hair sweep forward against her rosy cheek, he saw how lovely she was, and knew that this girl was as alone as he had been before Tonks had come into his life. Pulling a five pound note from his pocket, he leant forward to drop it into the guitar case, dotted with coins. The musician looked into his eyes and smiled at him; he could not catch his breath.

Severus pinpointed the source of the captivating sounds and began to circle behind the singer; he craftily remained out of her sight, all thoughts of a rendezvous with Lupin forgotten. The brunette Muggle was quite literally singing for her supper, if one were to understand the open instrument carrier and the occasional toss of a commuter's coin in the general direction of the young woman's feet. Some coins hit the pavement rather than the velvet, but the contributors were too hurried to notice where their gifts fell. Severus, however, was instantly protective of the thoughtlessly thrown largesse; no one would take any of the girl's money whilst he watched her.

Her song ended, and the young woman bent to gather the coins from the concrete and to place them on the lush lining of the case interior. In that moment, Severus was bemused to realise that the leather of the case was in better condition than the shoes upon the young woman's feet, and that the velvet lining was far more luxurious than the rather shabby clothes the minstrel wore. He found his curiosity piqued by the outer poverty of her apparel, versus the inner wealth of her music. He was infinitely pleased when she began to play again.

As if she felt his eyes upon her, she turned slightly, smiling at her inattentive audience. When her gaze locked with his, he felt the connexion as a disturbing lightening of his spirit. Instinctively, he scowled at her. Pointing her face heavenward and letting her voice soar with the joy of her song, she refuted his scowl with the humble offering of her radiant refrain.

A movement beyond the troubadour drew Severus' eye, and his brows contracted in a furious frown as he recognised Lupin, dropping Muggle money into the guitar case offertory. Lupin was engaged to Nymphadora Tonks, was he not? What did he mean by ogling this admittedly pretty street performer? Setting his jaw, Severus advanced on Lupin, his forbidding expression causing the other travellers to give him a wide berth as they hurried on their holiday business.

Although the girl continued to sing, Remus forced his attention back to the matter at hand. Moving away with a regretful expression, he walked slowly toward the archway to the next platform. He saw Snape slip through the archway, and as he followed, Remus heard Snape cast *Muffliato* and a quick Muggle-Repelling Charm.

"Did Tonks finally toss you on your werewolf arse?" Snape hissed.

"No," Remus replied tersely, frowning at Dumbledore's executioner.

"Is there some other reason you are leering at the Muggle street performer?"

Remus allowed a condescending smile to touch his faintly-scarred lips. "Do you fancy the girl yourself, Severus?"

Snape's lips tightened in obvious anger, but he did not respond, merely beginning to relate the data he had gathered regarding Ravenclaw's writing desk.

Remus bent his head in concentration, the guitar-playing Muggle woman forgotten.

Keladry no, it wasn't her real name, but it was the one she had taken for herself, here in London watched the greying man with the kind eyes move away from her, as the other man who had caught her eye strode ahead of him through the archway. On a lucky day, she might see one interesting attractive man; it was rare, indeed, to find two and virtually at the same time! A gentle smile touched her lips as she segued into her next number, revelling in her good fortune. She was on hard times, and she was alone, but she had not lost her faith, and she was careful to concentrate on the positive things in her life.

So enrapt was she in singing "O Holy Night" that she was unaware of the figure, which approached her stealthily from behind and stood watching her as she sang her heart out. Reaching the end of the song, she lifted the guitar strap from about her neck; it was becoming late, and she now had enough money in her case to buy a nice, warm supper.

The silky voice which spoke in her ear nearly startled her into dropping her guitar. "I have no one with whom to eat my Christmas Eve supper, either."

Keladry whirled, her heart beating an irregular rhythm in her chest, and gazed up into the sharp-featured face of the man standing uncannily close to her.

Before she could speak, he looked deeply into her eyes and said, "One should not spend one's birthday alone."

She wanted to ask how he knew she was alone how he knew tomorrow was her birthday but all coherent speech had left her, under the intense gaze of the man with the velvet tones of a classically-trained stage actor.

"Allow me to buy your meal at the pub down the way as payment for your enchanting performance. I assure you that I mean no harm."

Keladry dropped to her knees and began to gather the money from her guitar case with trembling hands. She was both thrilled and alarmed when the compelling stranger knelt, as well.

"It's it's not my birthday until tomorrow," she stuttered, her face flushed red in embarrassment. Oh, how she *hated* her tendency to blush when she talked to attractive men!

"I would call that quibbling," the man murmured provocatively, "wouldn't you?"

Looking up again and meeting his gaze, Keladry found herself unable to think of an objection to his plan. "All right I'll come," she agreed.

The man stood, lifting her encased guitar, and offered a gloved hand to assist her to rise. Taking the proffered assistance, Keladry felt very much as if her fortune had undergone a change for the better.

Thank you, she thought, casting a grateful look at the starry sky as they emerged onto the crowded street.

Pushing aside the voice of reason that screamed he had no time for such frivolity, Severus led the angelic-voiced young woman toward the nearest pub, feeling as if he had found the coin in the Christmas pudding.

"I can always Oblivate her," he promised himself, looking down into her sweet blue eyes. "Just for tonight."