

Sincerest Flattery

by Alison

A love triangle with a slight difference. Whose Patronus was conjured first?

Complete short story

Chapter 1 of 1

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(Author's note: The title is taken from the saying: "*Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery*".)

"But, Professor," Remus objected, "isn't the Patronus Charm NEWT-level?"

"Quite right, Mr. Lupin," Professor Gadby agreed. "However, I thought you fifth-years might appreciate the challenge. Now is the time to begin stretching your magical wings, as it were, in preparation for NEWTs. Now, I'd like all of you to stand, please. Spread out. Give yourselves plenty of room. That's right."

The Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher waited until the class of Gryffindors and Slytherins had moved into position and were looking at him expectantly with their wands raised.

"Now I want you to concentrate, class, with all your might, on a single, very happy memory. Then you repeat this incantation '*Expecto Patronum*'. If the charm works, you will see a silvery shield, in the shape of an animal usually, emerge from your wand. That is the force that drives off Dementors."

A few students who had older brothers or sisters who had undergone NEWTs nodded.

"My sister always has a centaur appear," sighed one of them wistfully. "He's all silvery and strong, so beautiful ..."

Professor Gadby smiled at the young girl. Centaurs were fairly common Patronuses, at least amongst teenage girls with a certain romantic turn of mind.

"What does your Patronus look like, Professor?" asked Lily Evans.

"A little demonstration might be a good idea," Professor Gadby answered. "Just to show you how the charm should work."

Holding his wand aloft he said, "*Expecto Patronum!*"

A large, silvery fox appeared and paced protectively about the teacher to the accompaniment of many appreciative "aaahs!" and "ooohs!" from the students before the

Patronus vanished.

"Of course," he reminded them all, "this is quite different from conjuring a Patronus to protect yourself against a Dementor. Here in the classroom your lives are not in danger, you can practice in confidence. But a Patronus is useful to know how to conjure. For instance, they make very useful messengers. They can carry a message to virtually any other wizard or witch anywhere in the country." He looked around at them all. "Concentrating hard on your happy memory? Then begin!"

The class began to practice.

Lily Evans thought about a happy memory. There were so many. How could she choose just one? She thought hard; what made her happy?

Her friends made her happy. She'd always been popular, even before coming to Hogwarts. But her best friend made her feel special because he was the first person who'd told her what it really meant to be witch. Long summer days spent talking and laughing about anything and nothing. Being together. She glanced across the room and caught Severus's eye, giving him a quick smile before casting again. A filmy something, insubstantial as shimmering mist, came from the wand.

Encouraged, she tried to think of something else. Quidditch, she really enjoyed the game. It was so much more exciting and fast-paced than Muggle games. Particularly now, as she was older, she noticed how good the young wizards in the Gryffindor colours looked on their broomsticks. Involuntarily, her eyes strayed to James Potter, practicing with his friends. All right, the boy was a toerag, arrogant and bullying, but oh, he did look good in a Quidditch uniform! More silvery mist shot from her wand, almost assuming a form this time. Scowling, she watched it dissolve. She hated James Potter! What was she doing, using him in a happy memory?

A few lines of song from her mother's favourite movie floated through her mind: "*Raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens ...*" and she smiled. Her family made her happy. Christmas at home with them, presents under the tree, eating too much Christmas dinner and singing carols outside in the snowy Muggle streets. The feeling of being loved. Even arguing with Tuney meant that she belonged.

"*Expecto Patronum!*"

From the tip of the wand burst a silver doe, fully formed. She landed on the floor in front of Lily, bounding around her in graceful, protective leaps. Lily cried out in delight, watching the beautiful apparition ...

James Potter stood off to one side of his friends. Lupin, he was slightly irritated to see, had already mastered the charm: a large silver wolf was slinking about him, its teeth bared in a snarl.

And Sirius also had something. It resembled the big, black dog he'd managed to turn into for the first time last week when they were practicing on Animagi forms. It was pacing along with the wolf, in its shadow, almost as if the pair was part of a pack. James hadn't managed to discover his Animagus form yet. He'd feel the strange stretching and oozing of his limbs and freeze, stopping the transformation. Sirius had laughed at him, said he just needed to relax, but it felt weird!

And he didn't want to turn into something nerdy. How embarrassing if he could only manage a mouse or something! He wanted to be large and impressive, something that would reflect his character, not something that Filch's cat could eat!

He concentrated hard. So many happy memories, how to choose? The one where he and Sirius had met? What about when they had included Remus and Peter into the group and started calling themselves the Marauders? A wisp of silvery gas emerged from his wand.

He grinned and concentrated again. What about that time he and Sirius had hidden under James's invisibility cloak and hexed Snivellus in the corridor leading to the Slytherin common room? That was a classic! Old Snivelly had never known what hit him; he had suddenly been trying to walk with his knees on backwards. Laugh? He and Sirius had nearly wet themselves! His Patronus to this memory was a little larger, but still amorphous.

Suddenly he heard a delighted cry and turned to see Lily Evans had conjured a corporeal Patronus. It was in the shape of a deer. But James stared at Lily. Her green eyes shone with delight as she watched her Patronus prance about her, and James had trouble taking his eyes off her. How could one witch be so beautiful? Her smile lit up her face again, and suddenly James knew the memory of her delight would never fade from his mind.

"*Expecto Patronum!*"

Something silver and shining erupted from the end of his wand. James screwed up his eyes to make out what it was. It was a stag with a beautiful antlered head and large, silver eyes. And James Potter realized he had not just managed a corporeal Patronus. He now had an Animagus form to aim for as well when the Marauders next attempted their illegal transformations. What was more impressive than a proud stag? With a wide grin, he let his Patronus romp close to Lily's doe, hoping she'd notice ...

Severus Snape was trying to think of a happy memory. Most of them involved Lily. His expression didn't give away his feelings, but he felt the familiar, sweet yearning deep inside, that strange ache in his chest that he always got whenever he thought of her.

The first magical person of his age he'd ever met, he'd known she was special from the moment he first saw her. It wouldn't have mattered to him if she had green skin and a wart on her nose. He would still have wanted to be with her. The fact that she was the prettiest girl in the whole of Hogwarts, and probably the world, was just the icing on the cake.

They were going to be friends always. They'd made a pact just before they left for Hogwarts and their first year at the magical school. They'd gone to what Severus always thought of as *their* special place, the little glade of trees beside the park, and with great solemnity, pricked the skin on their thumbs. Then each had squeezed out a drop of blood and smeared the ruby drops together, reciting, "Best Friends Forever!" That commitment had meant so much to Severus, so very, very much. Surely that was a magical memory! Silver fog shot from his wand, and for an instant he was sure he'd done it, sure that he'd created a corporeal Patronus. But it was insubstantial and lasted no longer than a second or two.

He frowned at the transience of it. Rather like their friendship, he thought morosely. Just lately, he'd noticed that Lily was becoming ... odd, a little ... distant. It worried him. And he hated the way other boys paid her attention, just because she was pretty, never knowing the real Lily, not like he did. Had she ever confided her hopes and dreams to them as she had to Severus, her best friend? No!

He particularly hated that bastard Potter. Not just because of the ongoing victimization Severus had suffered at his hands and that of his friends. No, Severus had seen the youth's attraction to Lily in his eyes, and it frightened him. Potter was good-looking and popular, and Severus? Not good-looking and certainly never popular, the eternal outsider whose only claim to fame was his phenomenal skill at hexes, winning him a place amongst his Slytherin peers. Severus feared that Lily might one day be tempted by the school Quidditch hero. And what would Severus do if he ever lost her?

He shook his head and refused to think along those lines anymore. He trawled through his memory for something else. Glancing up, he met Lily's eyes and saw her give him a quick smile as she attempted to cast the charm. Severus caught his breath. That smile was like the sun coming out after a rainy week or like the first hint of spring after a long dreary winter. Severus felt his depression lift, and he smiled back although she was now concentrating on casting. He continued to watch her, as usual unable to tear his eyes away from her.

So he saw it when she succeeded in casting a corporeal Patronus, heard her cry of delight and saw how her eyes lit up as a silver doe leapt from her wand and pranced about her.

Severus remembered to breathe again and took a shaky one. That doe was so very fitting, so ... so Lily. Her smile lit up his world, and the universe was a wonderful place once more. While the magic of her smile held him in thrall, he spoke the words of the charm.

"Expecto Patronum!"

A silver doe, the identical twin of Lily's, swooped from his wand-tip and raced around him, and he gazed at it in wonder. For an instant, he almost imagined that it had green eyes.

He turned towards Lily in triumph, wanting to share this moment of accomplishment, but she was not looking at him. Instead, she was gazing at the stag James Potter had conjured and was showing off, and a strange, speculative look was on her face. It almost looked as if she were impressed with the brash imitation.

Severus's doe flickered uncertainly for a second and then gently faded out of existence.

The End.

Author's note: If you liked this story, please have a read of my original story "Love Inhuman" at this link:

<http://www.thepetulantpoetess.com/viewstory.php?sid=11932>

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