

Tidemark

by Sigune

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Chapter 1 of 1

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He had washed upon the shore of her existence like a piece of driftwood, tempest-tossed, weather-beaten, and eroded by the sea's salt waters.

Brynhild was not the type who hunted for other people's treasures at low tide; she liked to buy things new, neatly bagged and with certificates. He, now, was a special case. Men did not come in boxes. Brynhild had considered her situation for a moment, shaken her curls, clicked her tongue, and decided to pick the poor thing up.

Alas, there was no warranty. She could not lodge a complaint anywhere when she grew to care for him and he did not love her back.

Dumbledore had said that the curse would not affect his soul because it was mercy, not murder. Severus, reassured by the Headmaster's promise that all would be well, complied with his request out of a sense of duty.

It was the sixteenth year of his expiation. He had not lapsed, not once, but kept his word to her, always. He had obeyed Dumbledore in everything, for her sake. And yet, that night, as he sat in the grass on the bank of the black river feeling faint and sick at heart, she did not come to comfort him. His hand trembled, his knuckles whitened around the handle of his wand as he repeated the spell over and over, coaxed, pleaded, ordered, *begged* the silver doe to appear and heal his soul with her lily-white light.

She never did show herself. She shied away from tainted things – from creatures that harboured so much darkness that they could strike a man down with the power of their naked hatred.

She bit back a snide remark when he appeared upon her doorstep around midnight after months of silence. Wild-eyed, ash-grey, and with claw-marks across his face, he seemed a little less than human as he staggered into the house.

She had to point out to him that he was wounded. He tried to heal himself but failed. She sat him down on the sofa and dabbed at his skin with disinfectant, though he hissed at her and would barely sit still. Then he told her what had happened, and her heart leapt up as she realised that there was something she could do.

She had long ached for this chance, but the shade of a dead woman forever stood in her way. That night things were different: only a living woman possessed the power to save Severus's soul.

When she woke up the next morning, he was gone, and only the creases in the sheets bore witness to his passing-by, like the ripples the retreating sea leaves in the sand. She stroked the crinkles with the palm of her hand and sighed. She did not think he would be back.

Severus stood by the window of the circular office and pressed his forehead against the pane. He was alone and without a beacon. The doe would have guided him across these troubled waters, but she had been ripped from him by the foulest of curses, and he had gone and sealed their separation by an act of betrayal. He had not dared to try and summon her since; he was too much ashamed of his fall.

The coolness of the stained glass made it hard to ignore the flush that mounted to his cheeks. He stepped away quickly and bit his lip. The memory of his weakness should not fill him with...

He stared at his own distorted reflection as though he saw it for the first time.

When he whispered the charm, the magic surged up inside him with unparalleled force, and from the tip of his wand his glorious guardian sprang once again, more radiant than ever.

He closed his eyes and pressed the lids with his fingers. Brynhild must be with child.

Old magic worked like that. Love mended the wounds of hatred, and life given cancelled out the effects of life taken.

Brynhild caressed her belly and smiled. She had never expected to wash away Severus's memory of a sanctified woman. All she had done was to offer him a choice, a gift on the tidemark where the sea meets the shore and leaves its traces on the beach.

He struggled against his own need; it was embarrassing to admit to. But the doe said it was right, and she could be trusted. In the end, he gave in.

Brynhild,

Marry me before I die.

SS.

Author's Notes:

This is my very first post-DH fic. Whew. I feel as if I have overcome a barrier.

Written for *Romancing the Wizard's* seventeenth challenge, this story is exactly 750 words long and contains a spell, a written 'message from the heart', and a marriage proposal.

The summary is adapted from Björk's song "Bachelorette", which I found inspiring while writing this story.

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