

Tea Leaves

by severed_lies

As Luna prepares for her wedding day, she shares a quiet afternoon with her guardian, Severus Snape.

Author's Note: Written for the Phoenix Flies Comm on Insanejournal.

Beta: Many thanks to Trickie Woo, to whom I am deeply indebted.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Severus stared at the mass of orange and pink lace masquerading as a proper wedding robe. He had dared to hope that, for once, his young ward would give in to good taste and choose a more traditional garment, but then, his attempts to influence her wardrobe had never been successful.

"It was the sash that really drew me to me to this one," said Luna, as she held up what could only be described as a length of twisted purple moss.

Severus literally bit his tongue to stop from asking if the girl was planning on wearing yellow and green shoes to complete the ensemble. He took a deep breath and counted to ten. Backwards. In Mermish.

"It suits," was the kindest thing Severus could think of to say at the moment. He had learned over the years that Luna would know exactly what he thought and felt, no matter what he said. He also knew that whatever was said about the dress would not matter. Once Luna set her heart on something, she could not be dissuaded.

Luna carefully folded her robe and sash and placed them back into the box that had just been delivered. She walked over to sit on the settee next to her guardian and accepted a cup of milky tea from him.

"And dare I inquire as to what your intended will be donning for the ceremony?" Severus asked, as he summoned a plate of sandwiches from the kitchen.

"Oh, Rolf found a lovely burgundy kaftan in Marrakesh," Luna answered, then she placed a few tomato and mint sandwiches on a plate.

Severus could not contain his snark a moment longer as he asked, "Isn't there a color or two you have somehow overlooked?" He bit into a thick roast beef sandwich as he waited for her response.

Luna, amused that it had taken a record four minutes for Severus to get to the point, patted him on the arm and pointed out that green and black were already a given for

his robes, and that the Scamander family was prone to wearing garments in red and gold tones for some complicated reason.

Severus snorted, then sat back to finish his roast beef as Luna prattled on about the plans for her wedding reception in excruciating detail. He learned more than he had ever wanted to know about the flowers chosen for the decorations and the ridiculously enormous amount of food to be served. Since Luna was luminous with happiness, he could not bring himself to end the chattering.

When the sandwiches were all eaten and the teapot emptied, the two sat in companionable silence for a while.

"Your parents would be proud of you Luna," Severus said. "I am proud of you."

Luna smiled. "I suppose that I will always miss them, but I could not have had a better guardian and I am grateful that mum chose you to take care of me."

"Ah yes, your mother and her penchant for tea leaves," Severus said without bite. "There was never a stranger case set before the Wizengamot."

Severus, after finding out how Diana and Xenophilius Lovegood had chosen him to be the guardian of their daughter, had been put off tea for several months afterwards.

"I do remember that we were both in quite a state, and despite the lengthy adjustment, we do get on quite well after all," Luna retorted.

Although Severus had, at first, been extremely reluctant to accept her into his care, he had eventually welcomed Luna into his heart, then fought tooth and nail to keep her in his custody.

"To this day I shudder when I think of you going to live in that poorly run asylum," Severus said.

Severus had been utterly gobsmacked when he found out that the guardian declaration had been all too official. Severus had argued vehemently against his own suitability to raising a child and tried his best to find a way to nullify the arrangement. He had quickly relented when the alternative of an orphanage had been mentioned. He knew all too well what that sort of upbringing could do to a child, what it had done to Voldemort.

Severus grimaced as he stood. The lingering effects from his brush with Nagini's magically enhanced venom had left a persistent and thoroughly annoying amount of muscle damage. As the years passed, he found that he had to work harder to overcome the debilitation. He once again waved off Luna's offer of assistance, still too proud to accept help if he could avoid it.

"I recall you having an engagement this evening," Severus said as he paced around the room, stretching his abused legs.

"Yes, Rolf and I will be meeting with the Peruvian branch of his family. You are welcome to join us," Luna said with her trademark sincerity.

Severus was tempted, just for a brief moment, to acquiesce.

"You know I cannot leave whilst my potion is in this phase," Severus said with a forced scowl.

Luna shrugged and picked up the box containing her wedding robe. "I will only be away for a few hours since I have quite a bit of packing yet for the honeymoon.

"Very well," Severus said as he levitated the tray of dishes and made his way into the kitchen.

Luna smiled as she ascended the stairs to her bedroom. She had learned a thing or two over these past ten years about persuading Severus to do what was best. She had just under two hours to make sure her guardian would accompany her out this evening.

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Severus pulled up a chair to his brewing table. That he could no longer stand for hours at a time still irritated him. Truth be told, he didn't need to stand for the next few steps of this brewing process. He tried to set his mind on the task at hand, but could not stop thinking back to that clear June day in 1991 when he acquired the one thing he never expected from life—a child to raise.

He had been looking forward to a peaceful summer of reading and brewing, but as luck would have it, Diana Lovegood had unleashed a spell that had interacted quite lethally with the Erumpent Horn hung with pride over the fireplace. The explosion killed the Lovegoods instantly and Luna, who had the good fortune of being at the local day school at the time, had been left on his doorstep before the sun set on that tragic day.

He had barely known Xenophilius, though he had worked with Diana on several projects for the Headmaster during the first war. The unconventional couple, aided by some arcane tea leaf reading, had somehow chosen him to raise their odd child.

Severus, roused by the stiffness in his left leg, stood to stretch the offending limb once again. He stood over the cauldron and stirred precisely six times in a figure eight pattern, then removed the rod, wiped the residue from the instrument, and gently laid it to rest beside his cauldron.

Too be sure, the flighty child and the sternly practical Potions Master had a rough few years as they both adjusted to the new order of things. Severus always recognized that underneath that shockingly independent thought process Luna held a pure intellect that could not be forestalled. He rejoiced when the Sorting Hat placed her in Ravenclaw House.

The only truly vexing argument to be had between the two of them, an old and tired one, was the girl's implacable, impossible belief in all manner of mystical and heretofore undiscovered fauna. Severus finally accepted the flawed logic of Luna's impassioned determination to study the most bizarre of these creatures. It made for a more peaceful household, and he finally became inured to the tall tales spun at the dinner table.

Luna's impending union to the Scamander boy gave Severus a few moments of grief, for Luna's beloved Rolf was just as determined in his quest for Nargles and the like as Luna. Still, Severus' faith in his ward had never weakened. With determination and sheer luck she had proven time and time again she had proven that some of those creatures, in fact, existed.

Severus sat down once again and added a scant measure of ground moonstone to his bubbling base liquid. As the color turned from dusky pink to amber, he noted the time in his log, and then settled back in the chair.

As Severus absently rubbed a finger over his bottom lip, contemplating the next few steps to the brew, Luna, dressed in a robe that mimicked the sunset hues of the Serengeti, returned to the sitting room and collected two cloaks from the tiny cloak tree that stood just behind the front door.

Luna walked through the kitchen and down the back steps, warding the house behind her. She hid the second within the voluminous folds of her own cloak as she meandered down the path to Severus' well-appointed potions lab. Peering through the window, Luna watching as Severus worked. He was in mid stir, and she waited until he was finished before she entered. She had learned very early that to disturb the Potions master mid stir was never tolerated.

Severus had heard her footfall atop the graveled path to his lab and smiled briefly as he remembered the first and only time that Luna had interrupted his brewing. He had to give the girl credit for conforming so easily to his high standards, wardrobe taste aside.

As Luna entered the pristine room, Severus said, "I trust you shall have an enjoyable evening."

Luna walked over to the occupied table and stood next to Severus, watching the delicate steam rise from the cauldron.

"You would have an enjoyable evening, were you to join us," Luna stated.

Severus raised an eyebrow as he turned his attention back to the elixir in progress. "And leave this critical experiment to be ruined? I think not."

Severus knew he could put the cauldron under a stasis spell. He knew that Luna was aware of this as well.

She was plotting, he could tell. The painstaking lessons that he had imparted over the years had taken root, but Luna had aptly twisted those lessons to reflect her stalwart sense of honesty.

Luna began her gambit with an air of nonchalance that was all too obvious to Severus.

"I have heard a rumor that the Physena will shortly be in full bloom," she began.

"Physena, how exciting," Severus replied dryly. It truly was exciting, an ingredient that he had coveted for some time, as well she knew.

Luna glanced up at the ceiling beams and continued. "As you know, it only blooms once every decade."

Aha, thought Severus, she had played her hand much too quickly. He reached out a hand to retrieve the stirring rod and said in a bored tone, "I have heard."

"It grows in the very Preserve where Rolf and I will be visiting next week," she said.

"Interesting, and how convenient that it thrives in just the very spot which you have booked for your honeymoon." Severus paused to stir the elixir and waited patiently for Luna to reveal her motives for discussing this tantalizing bit of news.

"It is the most fascinating isle. If we cannot find the Blue-rumped Nargles, then we should have time to gather a few flowers, that is if you are still interested," she explained.

The barest of twitches of Severus' ears alerted Luna to the depth of his interest in her offer. She did not often indulge in this sort of byplay, for she hadn't cultivated the love of subtlety that her guardian held so dear. She waited calmly for his reaction.

Severus shook his head. Luna never could draw out the suspense, but he appreciated her effort to indulge him in this manner. She truly cared for him, such a rarity that, and Severus would always cherish her attempts at the Slytherin arts.

"I suppose that suffering the company of the clan Scamander for a few hours might be worth a few Physena blossoms," he relented.

Luna unwrapped the hidden bundle of wool and, with amusement in her eyes, simply handed the garment to Severus saying, "Your cloak."

Severus should have known. For ten years this child, no, this woman, had gotten exactly what she wanted from him and he was never sorry to give in to her demands.

Taking his wand in hand, Severus placed a stasis spell upon the cauldron and then extinguished the flame beneath it. He took the cloak and gestured for Luna to exit the lab. Once they were both outside, he raised the wards on the lab, then donned his cloak and followed Luna to the center of the garden.

"I want you to promise me that you will not hide away while I am gone," Luna said as she prepared to Apparate to the inn that her fiancée and his family had reserved for their dinner party.

Severus tested the wards on the house and lab once more, then replied haughtily, "I will do as I please."

Luna looked up at Severus and caught his gaze. "You will miss me, but you are always welcome to meet up with the expedition," she said.

Severus felt a warmth spread throughout his body at the heartfelt invitation. He would do no such thing, but it was nice to be dear to someone.

He smirked and said, "I believe that the only thing to go missing will be the Nargles."

Luna smiled indulgently and said, "Oh, I will find them someday, but you shall have your Physena within the month. It all works out quite well, don't you think?"

"It does indeed," Severus replied. "Shall we go or are you planning some expedition in the garden this evening?"

Luna took Severus' arm, and as they Disapparated, the sounds of Severus' growling stomach and Luna's giggling echoed in the empty garden.