

The Best of Him

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Notes: Written for the LJ [snape_after_dh](#) fest. Huge thanks to [totaloakslady](#), [sigune](#) and [klynie](#) for their invaluable beta help. Much of the dialogue in the familiar scenes is from DH.

I also want to thank [rexluscus](#) for writing and sharing her [essay on the doe scene in Chapter 19 of DH](#) (for which the opening quote from DH is included below as a parallel between Snape's and Harry's view of the doe). It was about the only thing that cheered me up after the book, and as this story was inspired by it, it owes just about *everything* to that essay - *please* read that first if you can, as (hopefully) this will make more sense if you at least know the essence of it.

Though the darkness had swallowed her whole, her burnished image was still imprinted on his retinas; it obscured his vision . . . Now fear came; her presence had meant safety . . .

"Lumos!" *he whispered . . .*

Deathly Hallows, Chapter 19, "The Silver Doe", p. 318

The Best of Him

Snape had known that his would be a doe.

He'd known as soon as she had proudly shown off hers to him by the school lake, her face bright and her happy laughter ringing in his ears as it gambolled about him, surrounding him in its pure light. Lily white, he remembered thinking at the time. Her Patronus was as radiant as her smile, and he had always wanted her smile.

He'd known that his would take the form of her happiness because, in all of his happy memories, she was at their centre.

He could not remember or envisage a time without her. Even when Potter had bewitched her and wrenched her from him, her true essence, in spite of her denials, had loved him still, and Lily had bestowed this to him alone in the form of the silver doe. He treasured it every day because it was perfectly her. It was something that James Potter could never have.

Her Patronus, the best of her, resides deep inside him always, alive, strong and bright, ready to guide him when called upon.

When Dumbledore's portrait informed him that the boy must have the sword, Snape thought through various ways discarding them one by one until the only foolproof means to obtaining Potter's trust remained to him.

He resigned himself to it his plan and informed Phineas to do whatever necessary to determine Potter's location. Then all that was left to do was wait.

Each time Phineas was asked for news, Snape could hear the veiled curiosity as Dumbledore's portrait voiced concerns on how to deliver the sword to Potter unseen. But Dumbledore still insisted on his own agenda, even after death, and Snape in turn was not in the business of sharing his own plans with a gilt-framed painting.

Snape continued his duties at the castle and busied himself with restraining the Carrows' activities as much as he could. And when the Christmas break arrived and he discovered that even more children had been taken, snatched from the train, destined never to return to the school and the small measure of protection it offered them, he almost forgot his plan completely.

Then early one snow-filled morning, Phineas interrupted his anxious thoughts with the whereabouts of the boy. Snape forced himself to prepare mentally for the ordeal he had decided on weeks ago.

As he threw on his travelling cloak, he tried one last time. "And you still aren't going to tell me why it's so important to give Potter the sword?"

"No," said Dumbledore's portrait. "I don't think so."

Snape again dismissed the painting's concerns. "Don't worry, Dumbledore," he said. "I have a plan."

His plan. His own.

He had already removed the Pensieve to the dungeons in preparation. With the sword safely concealed beneath his travelling cloak, he entered his old office and approached the Pensieve where it sat empty and waiting on the desk.

He placed the sword against a chair and drew his wand. He needed to empty his mind of everything that might interfere with success. If he could not form the Patronus fully, his plan would fail.

She had surprised him a year ago when he had called her in the heat of anger. But he could not afford to take chances today with his position at the school at stake.

He pointed his wand at his forehead and felt his heart quicken. This stage would be over soon. But first he had to make sure that each fragment of memory was extracted precisely and completely.

Snape closed his eyes.

He Apparates without thinking and finds himself on a cliff top, weak moonlight touching the sea in the distance. A stinging wind drives the rain into him, soaking through his robes and chilling his skin.

He left the other Death Eaters as they panicked, anxious of what has become of their Dark Lord and what will become of them.

But all he can think of is her; of how she is gone.

It is his worst fears made true; the one thing that he was certain, despite her simple protests, could never happen.

He throws himself down. "Stay with me," he moans, the damp clay sticking to his palms. He lifts his head and grips his wand. His hand shakes. "Don't leave me!"

Then there she is in front of him, her silver-white light magnified tenfold. It spreads across the darkness beyond and forces him to blink away the water that stings at his eyes. Now he can see her better. But though her light shines as strong as ever, her outline seems vague she is slipping away from him heading toward the sea.

"Don't leave me," he cries out again, and his sudden cry releases a torrent of emotions and sends his drenched hair clinging to his face as he rests his hands on the ground before her. "Please stay! Please forgive me."

But his words are snatched away by the wind.

The memory of her happy face mocks him with its illusiveness. It belongs to a world he no longer knows or understands, and he begins to doubt its existence; it seems to show itself for the lie it always was as the glossy layers blister and peel away, leaving him with the smell of decay and death.

Frantically, he raises himself to his knees and looks to her light. Though it has diminished, she is, beyond hope, still here, looking out, standing before him with her elegant poise as the rain streaks through her flanks. She will not leave him! How could he have doubted her?

"Lily." He holds out his dirty hands.

She turns her head gracefully and rests her eyes on him then. He holds his breath as he looks into her soft gaze. She seems to beckon him. *Follow me*, her eyes implore him.

His fear gives way as if her light has pierced some covering that has bound his eyes.

The change within him works a nervous smile to his lips as the rain lashes down. Her radiance seems to waver against the dark sky, but still she stays with him. He has to follow her now before her light fades completely.

He pushes himself to his feet through the crushing dark, his gaze fixed on her through strands of hair as he tastes the salty water that trickles down his sodden face.

"Lily." He gasps her name in desperation. "Wait for me," he beseeches her. "Please! I'm coming. I'm coming with you."

He stumbles forward, blind only to her light.

Then with a tremendous tear, a great force rips the air between them. It sends him flying back to the ground.

He lifts his hand to shield his eyes, desperately searching her out... but he can no longer see her.

"Severus!" The voice is filled with anger as it roars through the wind, and Snape cries out to Lily in the dark.

He draws together all his energy and clammers to his feet. She is leaving him forever. "No! Don't go!"

Snape fights against his presence, but Dumbledore's fury overpowers him, sending him back down, and as he pushes at the earth, he finds Dumbledore barring his way, his face worse than those of the Furies themselves in the light from his wand.

"You will come back with me."

"She ... Gone."

Dumbledore seems to grow more impatient as he stares down at him unpitifully.

"Gone!" Snape implores. He heaves a shuddering breath and shouts, "She's waiting for me." And he begins to crawl around the towering figure that blocks his view of her.

"Do not think your death now will solve this, Severus."

Snape feels himself pulled up and back, away from where she has gone. "No!" He stretches out his hand to the ghost of her lingering light. "No. Let me go!" His words are choked from him as the strong hands shake his body.

"If you really wish to see her again, you must earn it! You must prove your worth."

Snape continues to fight against Dumbledore's grip, the air icy, burning his lungs. "She can't leave me...!"

"I will not discuss this here! You will return to the castle."

Snape, knowing this is his last chance to find her again, musters all his energy one last time. But the arms wrench him into a death hold, and he feels his world squeezed from him as Dumbledore Disapparates, and the trees of the Forbidden Forest, sentry-like in the dark, come into view.

Snape collapses to the ground. The grassy earth tears his nails as he claws it.

Snape lowered the glistening silver strand into the Pensieve.

He could not recall how Dumbledore had succeeded in getting him inside and to the headmaster's office unseen by the others in the castle.

Perhaps they *had* seen and heard. Perhaps they had dismissed it as impossible.

Or perhaps they had believed him mourning the passing of his Dark Lord.

Which was the more preferable, Snape could not say.

He stared at the memory as it settled into the rune-marked stone basin and took on its shape, spreading out into a shimmering mass. Some aspect of it must have still lingered in him, because as he looked he found himself somewhat loath to replace it on his return.

But that would soon pass.

The worst part of the process as he remembered from his weekly preparation for Potter's wasted Occlumency lessons was having to call to mind the weakest moments with all the frailty and danger of losing control to sentiment.

He favoured Occlumency greatly to this, and he would gladly have used it instead if it had not been so crucial today that he be able to cast the fullest Patronus.

Yes, he preferred being in command of his emotions. The last time he had found himself dwelling on what might have been just six months ago in Black's house he had condemned himself afterwards for such weakness. But he had not been able to bring himself to take out again the section of photograph from where he had concealed it safely not even to look on it again. He thought of it now, pressed to his chest.

Though he sometimes had an irrational desire to forget how much she haunted him, he found he still could not remove it.

Snape straightened himself and brought his wand back to his head.

With all his desires bent on one thing, he sends her, as strong and true as his need is that night, to carry his message to his old teacher.

The wind tosses leaves towards him. They dance around him on the hill as he waits at its peak, every moment that brings no sign of Dumbledore's arrival filling him with greater fear. Already he can feel the Dark drawing him to its depthless centre. He does not have the strength to overcome its pull on his own.

When finally the air rends, blinding white, sending his wand flying, he drops to the earth, overwhelmed with gratitude, though defenceless. Only then does the thought panic him if he dies now, Lily will have no chance of protection.

"Don't kill me!"

"That was not my intention. Well, Severus? What message does Lord Voldemort have for me?"

"No no message I'm here on my own account."

He pushes on with his request. Yet in some ways, he finds pleading with Dumbledore for her life worse than asking the same of the Dark Lord. The Dark Lord had merely looked on it as simple recompense for the prophecy. But Dumbledore makes him feel unworthy of asking for a life, ashamed of doing so, and he demands much more of him, as punishment.

Snape sets the value of the lives of the husband and child alongside hers. But still Dumbledore wants more.

The wind seems to press in on the bubble of quiet that imprisons Snape with him. Afraid it will break and Dumbledore vanish, Snape, at the feet of his Lord's enemy, looks into the eyes that judge him.

What will I give for her?

"Anything."

Snape unthreaded the memory from his mind, bringing it to the present and releasing it to rest with the others.

He glanced at the sword against the chair. His look hardened. There were more pressing matters to deal with than carrying out another one of Dumbledore's unexplained schemes.

Still, he would go along with it today and take the stupid Gryffindor sword to the boy.

But tomorrow, once this was over and Dumbledore no longer pestered him, he would devote more thought to how he could better allay tensions in the school.

Snape pushed the Carrows' unrelenting use of the Cruciatus from his mind.

He glared at the sword. Its glittering rubies seemed boastful; he had a sudden urge to snap the thing in two. If the boy knew it was he who brought it and the Dark Lord learned of it, the school and all its children would be utterly at the Carrows' mercy.

He took a deep breath and returned the tip of his wand to his temple.

Though he has spoken the word many, many times, and he has learned to be careful not to talk in her presence about her sister in an equally deprecating way, Snape has never ever used that word to her face.

Until Potter and Black finally forced it from him one day and took delight in his torture.

"Listen I didn't mean "

"Lily, you know I'd never "

"Please, Lily, wait "

But she refuses to listen to his pleas. It is Potter's fault and she cannot see it.

Yet Snape never gives up on her.

When she and Potter begin to spend more and more time together, Snape watches her laughter from afar and aches to be the one to share in it. He escapes whenever he can to some solitary spot on the school grounds and casts the Patronus Charm simply to be with something of her that will not judge him or turn from him or smile fondly at the mention of James Potter's name.

The silver doe listens not only to his talk of Potter but also to his thoughts of what lies ahead for him. She understands his fears as he contemplates his future. And she, the inner self of Lily who has longed for that power from childhood, shares his excitement in the promise of a future built on magic. Some day, her original self will share it with him too.

He realises then that Lily has turned him away simply because she cannot be seen with him openly as long as she remains trapped within her circle of fools, but that secretly, and just for him, Lily has made clear her true feelings and has never really left him. Though the Dark Mark is burned into his teenage arm, it is ugly and superficial compared to the best of her safely deep inside him. She can never fade or be defaced or removed.

A sound echoed in the corridor as Snape let the memory fall into the Pensieve.

He paused and listened, his wand poised by his head. He had not revisited his old office before last week in several months.

A burst of childish laughter rang out, followed by the sound of a door slamming shut in the distance; the bang reverberated down the dungeons.

Snape relaxed. The Pensieve would be safe here today. He had permitted a group of Slytherins to stay over Christmas while their parents were busy ingratiating themselves with the Dark Lord and his newly elevated followers. But Snape's old students would know to keep away from his dungeon office old habits were hard to break.

At least he knew that none of his Slytherins were likely to fall victim to the Carrows. None of them had been taken away by the Dark Lord's Ministry.

Yet that was little comfort compared to the growing numbers elsewhere in the school whom he felt useless to help.

But today.... There was still today, and then he could dwell on more essential matters tomorrow.

Snape turned back to the Pensieve and focused on the last remaining memory that still needed to be removed.

He has been forced to return to the Death Eaters to protect what little is left of Lily, in her son, to pretend nothing has changed.

But though he always took her enduring presence for granted, he knows his part in her death now will silence her light, that afterwards it will no longer guide him back from this. Yet he drives his fears from his mind and returns to this, to them for her.

She is far from his mind as Snape watches the woman fall to the ground under his confident stinging hex.

The woman crawls to a chair and grips one of its legs, peering up at him through terrified eyes blinded by tears.

He is distracted by the sound of shouting from the floor above. The din intensifies. Aurors will be here soon.

"Please," the woman begs. "Don't kill me."

She is probably in her late teens or early twenties, he thinks. Strands of brown hair cling to her cheeks, caught in the dampness from her tears.

She begins to tremble, her breath hitching with every sob. She knows the end is close. The noises around the house have begun to die down. Few of her family are left now.

Snape's eyes remain fixed through his mask on the woman as Lucius enters the room.

"Stop playing with the Mudblood and get on with it, Severus," he complains. "We're all done here. The Aurors will arrive any minute."

As if anticipating his words, the green of the Dark Mark flares outside; it blazes into the room, signalling the end of the Death Eaters' entertainment and the beginning of the villagers' terror-filled night ahead.

A sickly green moves across Snape's wand, which still points at the woman. For a second, the light reflects off her face as she looks about, futilely seeking escape. Snape freezes as the tear-filled eyes show green.

Her eyes. She is here.

A terror strikes him and breaks through the calm he has carefully established inside himself. He nearly cries out to her as he feels Lily's presence burn but Lucius's patience in the doorway is starting to wear thin, and Snape catches himself in time. Is Lily mocking him? Is she testing him, waiting to see him fail to see how easily he surrenders to the dark without her?

But it is she who has abandoned him, he reminds himself, just as she had that first time; she will refuse to offer him the same comfort tonight as she always used to after he opened himself to the dark. Her silver light will not be as strong. He fears that, this time, it will not penetrate the dark to reach him. Instead, she seems to have taken up residence in the green Mark, the mark of death; instead of providing comfort, his memories of her beautiful emerald eyes now haunt him.

His gaze shifts to the green above as a spark suddenly appears close by; it grows brighter and seems to race towards the woman.

Blinking as the resulting haze lifts, Snape turns and sees Lucius lower his wand. "Next time, I'll let you finish off mine," Lucius says, and makes to leave. "Now we really must go."

The green sky fades, curling into the skull of the Dark Mark. As it settles, its light begins to retreat from the room where Snape stands transfixed, leaving him in the shaky pool of white from the *Lumos* he does not realise he has cast in the commotion.

As he watches the sky, the balance shifts in the room around him as the green dies away, his own light taking its place, growing in brilliance. White gradually immerses him. His vacant gaze remains on the green snake that twists from the skull far above.

He does not see the light that he sends out from within himself.

Its unnoticed beam spreads from the tip of his wand the same place from where she sprang and where he knows he will never again take strength from her unfaltering, perfect light. Her light. What light could be stronger than hers was for him before her death? What else can show him the way home now?

His thoughtlessly cast *Lumos* holds him at its focus, the now brilliant white glow bathing him, its strength gaining, unobserved, unknown, as his gaze never falters from the deathly green above....

He let the fragment of memory fall into place in the Pensieve, its final image lingering in his mind. He frowned as the thread sank and merged silver with silver, now indistinguishable from the others.

He stared into the shimmering bowl. But there was no time to dwell on this now. He'd been here too long already; the boy could leave the forest for another location at any moment.

Snape replaced his wand and took up the sword, sweeping it beneath his cloak.

He took one last glance at the half-filled Pensieve, the mergence of some of his worst thoughts. Its surface glittered as he looked.

He wondered if this time he would have the courage to restore them all on his return.

He had known that this would be a doe. He had known it would take the form of her happiness, because all his memories with her at their centre were happy. Each moment of joy and contentment linked naturally to the next, until the chain was complete and unbreakable.

Snape reaches into his robes and takes out the small photograph, her glowing face smiling back at him in the light from his wand, giving him strength.

In spite of the cold tonight, Snape does not feel it. Her Patronus, the best of her, the best of him, resides deep inside him, alive, strong and bright, ready to guide him when called upon.

She is his guiding light, and it is she who directs his every action, is behind every one of his accomplishments.

Snape ends his *Lumos* and lets the darkness envelop him and his memories of her fill his mind.

He holds his breath as he sends her bright and perfect form into the forest. Tonight she will guide another through the dark as surely as she unerringly continues to guide him.