

Expiation

by star_girl

Snape searches for forgiveness, and finds truth...

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Severus' eyes flashed with triumph. He'd been looking for it for weeks, and now finally he'd found it. It had been partially covered by leaves and roots, and yet it glistened up at him now from the bottom of the forest floor, as if wanting to be found.

Severus picked up the Resurrection Stone hungrily and turned it over in his hands three times, eyes squeezed tightly shut, concentrating hard on the thought of Lily. He sensed a disturbance in the air around him, and his eyes snapped open, hoping against hope she would appear. He needn't have worried. There, in front of him, was his beloved Lily, looking back at him at first with shock, before a genuine, warm smile played on her lips.

"Severus," she said quietly, and just the sound of his name from her mouth made him tremble, white-hot tears pricking his eyes from all the years of the raw needing, the wanting. It had been decades since he'd heard her say his name, and still it shook him to the core, like she was reaching in and taking hold of his very soul.

"You've been so brave," she said, reaching out a hand towards the stern, shaking man in front of her.

"Lily," he gasped, reaching for her too. He knew if he tried to grab her, his hand would pass right through, like a ghost or a memory. Instead, he held his hand up, palm facing towards her, and she did the same, drawing it close enough to touch. Her green eyes gazed into his black ones, calm and beautiful and full of tenderness.

"Thank you, for all you have done," she said simply.

"Lily, i—it was my fault, all my fault—" he began.

"Shhh," she soothed him, stepping forward to run a ghostly hand down his cheek. Severus shut his eyes and swallowed, every nerve ending alert and on fire at her ethereal touch. "You saved everyone. You showed more courage than even the proudest Gryffindor. You protected my son, even though it broke your heart to even look at him. Don't you dare apologise to me."

Severus could not stop the fat tears falling down his pale cheeks. She understood. She was not angry.

"I did it for you, Lily," he choked.

"I know, Severus. Why did it take you so long to show your love for me?" She was standing close to him now, looking right up into his face, her eyes filled concern and sorrow.

Severus was taken aback by this. "Lily?" was all he managed to croak.

"Things could have been so different, if you told me how you felt back then. I loved you, Severus! I thought you knew that!" Her eyes were shining up at him with pure emotion. Severus stared at her open-mouthed, a fresh tear running down his arched, prominent nose.

"What?" is all he managed to splutter in disbelief.

"I loved you," she said more quietly now. "But the day you called me a Mudblood was the day I thought you hated everything about me. It was too painful, being in love with someone who hated me for something beyond my control. That's why I shut you out, Severus. I shut you out to try and forget my love for you."

Severus felt the breath go from his chest, as if winded. "Lily, no, no, I'm sorry-"

"Shhh, Severus," she soothed again, this time reaching up to place an otherworldly kiss on his lips. "It's important for you to know this. I know every inch of pain and regret you suffer, for it is my pain and regret also. We should have been together, Severus," she breathed, wanting him to understand. "I thought I knew you, but I didn't know you at all. I thought James was a better man than you, but I was so very wrong." She smiled up at him now, and Severus could see there were tears swimming in her eyes.

"Oh, Lily," muttered Severus, his heart breaking just a little more with the knowledge of what could have been.

She brought her hand up once more, the ghostly caress against his pale cheek. "We cannot change what is past," she whispered. "But I wanted you to know how I felt about you, so you can let go of me, and stop punishing yourself. You have nothing but my love and gratitude, Severus Snape."

Lily, Lily, Lily... Severus wept openly now, the sound of the rustling trees punctuating the silence as the ghostly figure of his one true love, his only love, stayed beside him as the years of pain and suffering washed through him and engulfed him like a tsunami.