

Absolution

by sunny33

We all have choices to make. Sometimes it is too late.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: They belong to JKR. I borrowed them. I will put them back. Honest!

The breaking day sends inquisitive shafts of light through the grimy windows of the tumbledown building. A man's body lies untended on the filthy floor in a pool of darkening blood. A soft groan belies his apparent death. "Tired... so tired." The husky voice is barely audible.

"Where am I? Mother... is that really you? Am I dead?" He stares at the familiar woman bending over him. The dusty shack has transformed into an endless plain of nothingness.

"It is me. You are not dead. Yet. You still have the choice to live." Her gentle touch reminds him of his childhood. Before he started drinking. Before he started hitting. Before he killed her.

"I'm sorry. I should have stopped him. Forgive me!" he pleads.

"You were fifteen. It was not your fault. You do not need my forgiveness. You need your own." Her tender smile lingers in his sight as she fades from view. He reaches out to grasp at emptiness. Eyes close in despair. Alone again.

"Don't give in." Another voice from the past intrudes on his solitude.

"Reg?"

"In person." The dark-haired young man's laughter fills the void of in-between with warmth and memories.

"Why? What is this place?" His oxygen-deprived brain is having trouble understanding. The life force continues to seep relentlessly from the wound in his neck.

"This is where you have to decide. Life or death. Guilt or absolution. Accept death or fight it. I chose to join the Death Eaters. It was not your fault. I knew the risk when I stole the locket. You could not have changed anything. Let it go." He waves and silently disappears.

His chest is becoming tight. Breathing becomes an effort. Tired... so tired.

"Lily." A single word breathed as the woman he loved for so long appears. "I didn't mean..."

"No. You didn't know. How could you know?" she chides gently. "He did it. He killed us. Not you. You would never do that. It was not your fault." She is gone before he has the chance to protest. He weeps for lost opportunities. The endless space weighs heavily on his mind. Choices. When did he ever have a choice?

"You have had few choices in the past. Your life has been to a large extent determined by others – myself included. I know that you blame yourself for my death. It was unavoidable. The pain of that curse was becoming unbearable. I was dying. You delivered me from the hell that had become existence and furthered our efforts against evil. Forgive yourself. It was not your fault." The old man's eyes glitter with unshed tears as he gazes upon the man he cared for as a son and used mercilessly as a tool of war. "There are people out there who love you and would miss you. You just have to believe. And fight for the chance to find out who they are."

"Love me?" He is incredulous. No-one cares. No-one has even been to check if he is alive. He closes his eyes to avoid the feeling of loss as the old wizard leaves him once again. Tired... so tired. His hand clenches tightly around the precious vials. Maybe. He will just rest a little first.

"Professor... Professor? Severus?" This last spoken gently... sadly. A touch on his face. Soft. Warm. Alive.

He opens his eyes to drown in her intense regard. He sees a fierce determination mixed with fear. And something... maybe something worth living for.

"Tired. So tired." His eyes drift closed. She watches in horrified fascination as his hand relaxes. Three vials tumble onto the floor.

Antivenin.

Phoenix tears.

Blood replenisher.

All unopened.

A/N: Another comma-free contribution. Thank you, my dear LITC, for your beta skills.