

Divergence

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Severus sat there with the word ringing in his ears. For some people sights or smells brought the past hurdling into the present, but for him, after seeing and smelling so much death, he had learned to block those senses. For him, certain words triggered his memories, and most of his memories were not happy ones. There was a time when he would have thought differently...until he destroyed it all with one word. Phineas Nigellus was still ranting from his picture frame, but Severus had blocked out the old headmaster's voice as the anger from hearing that one word echoed in his head... Mudblood.

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Severus couldn't concentrate on his O.W.L. exams. The week had been filled with one exam after another with studying crammed in between rushed meals and very little sleep. However, it was not the busy schedule and lack of sleep that bothered Severus...it was Lily. Their relationship had been slowly changing since third year. They had always had disagreements throughout their friendship, but being in different houses and having different friends had begun to take its toll. Their worst fights always came just before the end of term when they were both under a lot of pressure, only to fall back into their relaxed camaraderie over the summer months.

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Severus boarded the train, dejected. He had taken his anger for James and Sirius out on Lily, and she hadn't forgiven him. Even the thought of the summer holiday and its possibilities didn't lighten his mood. His cloak drawn tightly around his thin body, he sank into the far seat in the last compartment...no one joined him. The rhythmic noise of the train clattering along on the rails irritated him more than usual. He fingered his wand, ready to hex the first person who dared to open his compartment door and remind him of the past few weeks.

A grey mist clung to the air like cobwebs on branches, thick and oppressive with smoke billowing up from the factory. The only noticeable change in seasons that Severus could remember was the rise and fall of the temperature and whether or not the ground was icy. Severus could not remember a hotter summer and with little reward of sunlight. Despite the heat, he wore his black school robes...his ridiculous Muggle clothing fit even worse than the previous summer.

Any day that held the promise of sunshine, Severus spent waiting for Lily at their spot, hidden in the trees by the river bank. In the beginning, he had refused to go actively looking for her, but as the stifling months droned on, he became desperate to speak to her before the school term began again. Severus thought he was being discreet until Petunia cornered him at the park.

"I've seen you skulking around our house, Severus Snape."

"And what's a Muggle like you going to do about it?" His hand automatically went to his wand.

"I'll tell Lily what you really are." Her shrill voice pierced the air.

"A wizard?" Snape scoffed. "She's a witch, or have you forgotten?"

"I haven't forgot what a couple of freaks you are, but apparently you've even become too much of a freak for Lily because she only came home for a day before she left again to spend the summer holiday with Gran. She said she needed a change of scenery."

The color drained from Severus' face...his wand pointed at Petunia threateningly.

"Maybe she had to get away from you," he sneered.

The merry-go-round began to spin, and the swing chains began rattling. Petunia ran. Severus crouched down, his robes pooling in the dirt around him, and cried. He knew in his heart that Lily was avoiding him...he had lost his best friend, his only true friend.

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Severus' sixth year was just as dismal as his summer had been. He felt that if he could just talk to Lily alone, he could put things right again. However, Lily was not only avoiding him but also constantly flanked by James Potter and Sirius Black. A certain awareness of her beauty had changed her demeanor...Severus was dismayed to see her walking through the halls giggling absurdly and twirling and flipping the long ends of her wavy, red hair. He missed his friend who smiled shyly and anxiously chewed the ends of her hair. Even more disparaging than the scathing looks that Potter and Black gave him as they sauntered past with Lily between them was the way she looked past him, as if he wasn't even there. As the year progressed, Severus became more reclusive, throwing himself into his studies.

On the last day, Severus found Lily by herself on the train, securing her trunk in the back compartment. Lily tried to brush past him as if he were nothing more than a Demiguise.

"Lily, don't do this."

She turned, stirring the air in the cramped compartment. Severus breathed in her scent.

"Do what?" she snapped, "Have the same argument that we had the end of last year? Have the argument I've been avoiding over and over all year?"

"I..."

"I can't do this Severus. I told you before, you've chosen your path, and I've chosen mine. Maybe one day our paths will cross again, but not now, not until you get on the right path."

"The right path?" Anger tinged his voice. "And what would the *right* path be? Yours? Potter's?"

"There is no need to bring James into this."

"Oh, it's James now, is it? What happened to toerag?"

Lily looked confused.

"You bloody Gryffindors, always acting so damn self-righteous. You think you know your so-called friends? I could tell you a..."

"As opposed to your friends?" She cut him off. "I'll take what you seem to think I don't know about my friends any day over what you probably do know about yours." She was yelling now. "Ugh! Nothing's changed. This is what I swore I wouldn't do. I do not have to justify my friends to you, especially with the company you keep."

Severus could see the disgust in her eyes. She didn't have to say the word; he knew what she was thinking.

Lily pushed past him out of the compartment, wiping a tear from her eye as the door slammed behind her.

Severus looked for something to hex. Despite all his planning and imagining his conversation with Lily, it had gone all wrong yet again. As he walked down the narrow train corridor, he paused at a few doors, watching his fellow classmates. He found the compartment with Avery and Mulciber. If that was all Lily Evans thought of him, then that was what he would be. Because of her, Severus had been evading their attempts at persuading him to join the Death Eaters and take the mark when he came of age, but that would all change next year. Severus opened the compartment door, joined Avery and Mulciber, and for the first time rode the Hogwarts Express with someone other than Lily.

Severus always stayed at Hogwarts during Christmas break, but during his last year, he went back to Spinner's End...briefly. He did not look for Lily but prepared and waited...waited for Lucius Malfoy to contact him. The owl came just like any other, the note written on fine parchment...a formal invitation to spend Christmas Eve and the following week with the Malfoys. Severus knew his mum would be proud, seeing him making friends from prominent families, but he knew what the invitation really meant. He would be taking the Dark Mark, joining Voldemort, and changing his life.

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When Severus returned to Spinner's End, his arm had healed, leaving nothing more than a mark that looked like a tattoo and a slight tenderness, but his mind had not. Nothing could have prepared him for the ritual and pain that he had had to endure. He was now thankful for Lucius' vagueness because he was sure he would have been too scared to go through with it if he had had time to think on it, but with Voldemort standing over him, there was no turning back.

It was New Year's Day, but only just...the sun had not yet breached the horizon, though the birds chirping outside his window told Severus that daylight was not far off. He could hear the drunks and revelers clumsily making their way home...loud slurred voices, empty bottles clanging into skips, retching. His senses were still on edge; he needed to get away from the stale air that seemed to stagnate near the factory. He walked to the first place he thought of.

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Lily's New Year's Eve did not go as planned. Meeting up with most of the Gryffindor seventh years had sounded like fun when they were planning it, but when that many different personalities got together and started drinking, trouble ensued.

Although she had gone out with James a few times, Lily did not consider them seriously dating. Lily enjoyed his company, but she had her studies to look after, especially with the N.E.W.T.s just a few months away. At the party, James got possessive of her, which Lily did not tolerate. Sirius, being his usual flirtatious self, took advantage of the discord between James and Lily and made a pass at her. James and Sirius had a row over her. Then, Sirius tried to kiss Lily for which she slapped him, raising the ire of James against her for slapping his best bloke.

Lily knew it would all get sorted out when the boys sobered up, but she wasn't in the mood to wait around until that happened. She went to the one place where she knew she could get some air.

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Severus sat with his legs stretched out in front of him, tossing what bits of vegetation he could find poking through the ice into the slow-moving stream. A crunching noise to his left made him turn his head in time to see a hint of a shadow. His eyes followed the shadow through the trees until it became Lily in the dim light. Severus slowly stood.

Lily stopped in her tracks at his movement.

"Severus, I'm sorry. I didn't expect anyone to be here."

He could tell she had been crying. He took a step toward her.

"Did you mean that?"

"What?"

"That you're sorry?"

The look in his eyes told Lily that he hoped it had a deeper meaning, and for a split-second, she wished it could. She shivered in the cold. When she didn't immediately turn to leave, Severus closed the distance between them and placed his cloak around her shoulders, hoping she would stay. Lily watched his fluid movements; he had a quiet confidence about him that she hadn't noticed before and that she found attractive.

The early sunlight played with the shadows of the trees on the snow; the filtered light cast a softness to their surroundings. Lily could almost picture them as children again...scraping up the ice into snowballs and spending the afternoons in ice forts planning their attack.

"Severus... I am sorry things changed between us."

His arm was still lightly around her shoulder...he rested his chin on her head, memorizing the feel of her next to him.

"Me, too. Things were much easier and simpler seven years ago."

"I wish we could get some of that simplicity back. Do you think it's possible?"

"Show me one of your favorite memories from our school breaks."

Lily opened her mind to him.

It was a warm summer night. A much younger Lily was standing near a tree with her hands over her eyes...counting.

"I'll find you, Severus Snape. You can't hide forever."

Lily picked up a jar of glow worms and headed into a thick outcropping of trees and shrubs. A minute later the sound of laughter filled the air as she chased him out of hiding, her long legs almost keeping up with his gangly form.

The memory faded.

"If only we had been allowed to use magic outside of school, I would have caught you, Severus."

"Who's to say some of us didn't use magic?" He smiled at her.

The scandalized look he loved appeared on her face as she half-heartedly punched him in the arm. The residual pain in his arm reminded him of how much things between them really had changed.

"You know, you were the first person, well... besides myself, that I saw do magic. You don't know what it was like to live with a secret like that and think you were going crazy. Then, to have someone come along that was just like you. I was so in awe of you."

"What changed, Lily?"

"You did... I did." There was a sadness to her voice. "Let me see one of your favorite memories, Severus."

Touching his wand to his temple, he pulled at a silver strand and passed it to Lily.

Two lanky teens took the bus to London and walked through The Leaky Cauldron and into Diagon Alley. It was the end of summer before their fifth year, and their parents had let just the two of them go shopping for school supplies. For Severus, the day had gone just as planned for once. They shopped for books, ate too many sweets, looked at familiars, ate too much ice cream, and perused the apothecary. By the end of the day, they were walking hand in hand, at ease in each other's presence.

The Muggle bus seemed to take much longer on the way back, and Lily fell asleep, her head coming to rest on Severus' shoulder. He gently brushed the hair from her face and kissed her on the forehead.

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The memory ended. Lily was blushing.

"Severus, why didn't you ever tell me how you felt?"

"I thought you knew." He turned away. "It doesn't matter now."

"It does matter." She grabbed his arm, pulling him back to her.

At that instant, a pain like fire burnt up his arm; he stumbled, grabbing at his arm.

"Severus, are you okay?"

"You were right, Lily." His voice was raspy. "We have each chosen our own path, and we can never go back."

He could feel the heat of his tears threatening to spill over the rims of his eyes.

"I have to go, Lily."

"Severus, wait!"

"You were right about me." He raised his shirt sleeve just enough for her to see the mark, turned, and Disapparated before her first tear hit the ground.

Lily walked slowly back to her house...mad at Severus...mad at herself. Wiping the tears away with both hands, a twinge behind her right eye kept bothering her. She closed her eyes tight, and there it was again...Severus' memory. A part of him, untainted, would always be with her.

how they were once best friends, including the "Snape didn't give Harry all his memories" premise.