

Treasures Beyond Gold

by tjwriter

Lily gives Harry the other side of the story.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Harry Potter had seen many things dwindle in the years since the war. The things he missed the most were the things he thought he'd never lose: his friends, the love of a good woman, and, as he opened the door to his vault at Gringotts, the most pressing thing that was dwindling, his savings.

The friendships he knew would survive. They had been through too much for too long to ever truly be free of each other. It was just that right now, being around them brought back so many memories he was trying to move past. He imagined it was the same for them. Plus, life gets hectic, and sometimes you hardly have enough time even for the bare minimum of what you truly want to do.

Ginny, now that was something he didn't know what to do about. He was becoming painfully aware that the ~~idea~~ idea of living with a hero and the actual *living* with a hero were two different things. He knew it wasn't just her. Heroes were supposed to live happily ever after. They weren't supposed to question their victory, weren't supposed to long for things that were dead and gone. They were supposed to put all that behind them and look into the bright, clear future with nothing but hope and vigor. They certainly weren't supposed to have doubts about their future. More and more these days, he found himself wondering what exactly it was he had been thinking, wanting to be an Auror. He must have forgotten that Aurors worked for the Ministry. The last thing he wanted to be was a Ministry stooge.

As he looked at his small stack of coins where piles upon piles of silver and gold had once been, he couldn't help but doubt his future. He couldn't help but bemoan the fact that he knew so very little about his past. Why was it that he'd never asked until everyone who had the answers was dead and buried?

He remembered that first day when Hagrid had brought him to this vault, and how he had been stunned and mesmerized by the riches before him. *Mine*, he had thought, as only a boy who had never owned anything could. However, through the years, these riches had never felt fully his. So, when the expenses of post-war restoration came up, he had had no problem reaching into the supposedly endless stores of gold and silver and supplying the world with statues, memorials and scholarship funds in honor of the lives lost.

Reaching for the money he would need to pay the monthly bills, his eyes caught something that was neither silver nor gold. Hiding behind the stacks, he spotted just a corner of something that looked like a small wooden chest about the size of a jewelry box. Task forgotten, he cleared the surrounding coins and reached out for the box. He saw there was a tag on it with his name written in a familiar hand. He'd only seen it once before, but the image of the letter from his mother that he had found in Sirius' bedroom was something he would never forget.

With shaking hands, he opened the latch. A large envelope with his name, again in that same hand, lay across the top.

Harry...

I plan to write one of these every year, just in case. If you are reading this one, my first, I am so, so sorry! Sorry that you grew up without a mother, perhaps without a father, and without knowing every day in every way how very much you are loved.

Harry sat down without noticing, without even looking at what else was in the chest.

There are so many things I want to tell you. The most important is just how much we love you. We want so much for you; but nothing matters more than giving you a life without fear, without needless death and without war. I can only hope that we succeed in any of that.

The rest of the things I want to tell you are things that I'd rather show you. In here, with this letter, is a select collection of my memories. I want you to know the real me...warts and all. If you've met my sister, your Aunt Petunia, then chances are you know many of my faults. If however, Sirius, Remus or Peter raised you, then all you will know are my virtues, and you will have a warped sense of who I am, and certainly who your father is.

What I want to share is a story of my life with someone whom perhaps you've never met, and maybe never even heard of: Severus Snape. Perhaps, however, you have heard of him, and nothing has been good. When last I saw him, we were on diverging paths. I can only hope that he didn't let the pain, anger and darkness inside of him take control, and he came out of this a different man than I last saw. I can hope. Whether or not he is hero or villain in further chapters of the story of his life, I want to tell the story of what he was to my life.

Why him, why this? For the same reason that I hid this here for you to find when you were old enough to understand it. I need you to understand that I, contrary to my sister's belief, was not a villain, and unlike my Gryffindor friends' view, I was not perfect. The person who saw the real me as much as ... perhaps even more than ... your father did, was Severus Snape.

The bottles are labeled in the order I'd like you to view them. I'm going to assume you understand how a Pensieve works, if they're still covering that in 7th year. If not, Remus should be able to help you, or hopefully, Professor Dumbledore will be able to show you the way.

Original errand forgotten, Harry cradled the chest carefully and made his way to the street before Apparating to Hogmeade, on his way to where the only Pensieve he knew was located. He was sure Acting Headmistress McGonagall would allow him access. She refused to allow anyone to call her Headmistress, as she had been looking for a replacement since she'd received the unwanted promotion after the war; oddly no one seemed willing to take on the job.

He sent his Patronus up to the castle when he arrived in Hogsmeade, making his way to the gates of Hogwarts to await her response. The gates were just opening as he arrived. She met him at the gargoyles before her office steps moments later.

"What brings you here?" McGonagall asked, looking pleased but apprehensive. It was a look he was getting accustomed to whenever he went anywhere unannounced, as if he was a perpetual bearer of doom.

"My mum actually," he answered. He told her about the letter and her memories while they made their way up to the office.

"Of course. Take all the time you want. I'll leave you to it, and won't need the office again until tomorrow morning. Feel free to join us for dinner if you'd like."

"Thank you, Professor."

When she had gone, he took out the chest and approached the Pensieve. Very carefully, and in the order she had indicated, he poured the memories into the glowing mass. Instantly, he saw fragments of people and places. He didn't know how long he would be walking with his mother, but he was prepared to take as long as she had given him. He could feel the anticipation of long-sought answers to questions as he hovered over the surface of his mother's memories.

The playground he landed in was so different that Harry was convinced that he was seeing a completely different day. But, as he watched his mother and her sister swing, and heard Petunia scold, the déjà vu of it told him it was the same day he had seen in Snape's memories all those years ago. He scanned the bushes surrounding the park and saw Snape hunched behind one of them, watching with the hungry expression Harry remembered. He chalked up the different feel of the memory to the fact that it was from his mother's mind and not Snape's.

He watched her fly off the swings. He remembered when he was young, before he knew about magic, and how sometimes he had thought he could fly, and sometimes he actually did fly, when he needed to get away, when his life was in danger.

She looked so happy, so taken care of, as if she never had to get away from anything. Harry found himself understanding the hungry look in Snape's eye more than his own mother's trusting smile when Snape finally approached the two girls.

It was almost exactly as he had seen before in Snape's memories. The few changes were marked, though. The most important was right before Petunia dragged Lily off. Lily came very close to Snape, leaned to whisper in his ear. Harry barely heard her: "We're going to be best friends. I can tell."

She was dragged off by her sister, and Harry had to follow, but he looked back at a dazed Snape who hadn't moved from the spot where her whispered breath still floated around him.

"...creepy nutter," Petunia was saying when Harry caught up.

"Oh, I don't think so. I think he's sad."

"Sad? I think his outfit is sad."

"Oh, Tuney, don't be that way. I'm sure he didn't choose to dress like that."

"Well, you have to admit he's creepy."

Lily shrugged. "Maybe."

The world shimmered around him, and the next scene he was standing in a sitting room. His mother was flailing around excitedly, a letter in her hand, and a much younger Professor McGonagall was standing across from her. Petunia stood in a corner, arms crossed and looking petulant. Two adults that could only be Harry's grandparents tried to get Lily to calm down, looking embarrassedly at McGonagall, seemingly ashamed that they had no control over their daughter's hyperactivity.

"Severus said it would happen, but I didn't believe him! I couldn't believe him!"

"Severus?" McGonagall asked.

"Yes, she met a boy, Severus Snape I believe, at the park. He told her she was a witch and he was a wizard. He told her about Hogwarts. Like her, we didn't believe either," Mr. Evans said. Harry couldn't think of him as his grandfather. He wished he could. "You're telling us it's true? That our Lily is a *witch*? Like a real magical witch?"

"Yes, Mr. Evans, it is true."

He clapped his hands in glee. "Did you hear that, Mother? Our Lily? A witch? Wait 'til we tell the neighbors!"

McGonagall's horror-filled expression matched Petunia's. "We have to ask you all not to do that. The less non-magical, or what we call Muggle, society knows of the wizarding world, the safer it is for all of us. That is why I have come here to fill you in on the opportunity we are presenting to your daughter, instead of just sending an owl."

"I'm sorry, an owl?" Mrs. Evans asked.

"Lily!" Mr. Evans finally raised his voice to his daughter who was still twirling around the room. "Please settle down and listen. This is your future we are discussing."

Lily stilled at last.

Harry listened while McGonagall explained how the wizarding world and, more importantly, Hogwarts worked. He couldn't help remembering a similar scene in Dumbledore's memory, a bit sadder, a bit creepier, yes, but still, it made Harry think bitterly of his own experience in finding out about Hogwarts. How many letters had shown up trying to tell him what he would have never understood before Hagrid had finally come? What would he have thought if he had gotten a hold of one of those letters? Why did no one show up at his house with that very first letter?

The scene flickered again, and when it focused, Lily was walking down the street. Harry ran to catch up. It was dark, and the streets were empty. His mother walked with no fear, even when the neighborhood got seedier. Standing outside a darkened house, Lily looked up to where one candle was burning in the window. She approached the large elm beside the house, climbed up it effortlessly with a practiced grace, and perched herself on the limb that allowed her to easily tap on the window.

A slightly older Severus than the first memory opened the window, and Lily crawled into his bedroom. Harry closed his eyes, and when he opened them, he was in the room with them.

"Did you get it?" Lily asked by way of greeting.

Snape held up his letter, already creased from opening and closing. "Did you?"

She beamed, holding out her letter and embracing him. He spun her around, and then they jumped up and down.

"BOY!" came a shout from downstairs.

They stopped cold and waited to hear if the voice would climb the stairs. "Sorry, sir," Snape shouted, turning from her.

"Did an owl really deliver your letter?" Lily asked.

"Of course, that's how all letters are received. How did you get yours?"

"A real life, true witch came and gave it to me." She jumped lightly onto his bed. Tucking her legs under her, she motioned him to do the same before telling the story.

They sat across from each other, their knees touching.

"We're really going," Lily whispered in awe.

"We're really getting away."

"Are you scared?"

"Of leaving? No."

"No, I mean, are you scared to go somewhere so far away, by ourselves, not knowing anyone?"

Snape shrugged. "We have each other."

"You're right. As long as you're there, I won't be scared at all." Then she leaned over and kissed him softly on the lips.

Snape's eyes bulged, and it took him a minute to pucker his lips and return the kiss. She pulled away giggling.

"Why did you do that?" he asked.

"I'm sorry. I just felt like it. You didn't like it?"

Involuntarily putting his fingers to his mouth before answering, he said, "No, it's not that. Just surprised is all. You've never kissed me before."

"Never wanted to before."

"And now?"

"It was nice."

"Yeah. It was."

The world shimmered and faded, and when Harry again focused, the two participants of the previous memory were once again in a bedroom, in the same position on the bed. This room, however, was larger, more decorated, and definitely belonged to a girl. A Muggle-raised girl. A record player spun in the corner, filling the room with Frank Sinatra singing about loving someone who was all wrong for him.

"Your turn," Lily was saying.

Snape looked around nervously before holding his hands out, palms up.

"That's it? You want to hold hands?"

He bit his lip. "Is that stupid?"

"No, not at all." She placed her hands on top of his. He cupped his fingers around her hands and squeezed.

"Where are your mum and dad?"

"They had to go to some meeting at my old school. Something about explaining why I wasn't coming back next year."

"Your sister's watching you?"

"Yeah. She's probably around here somewhere trying to turn water to wine."

"What?" Snape asked. Lily went to take her hands from his, but he held them tighter. She smiled and relented.

"She tells me she thinks I'm a freaky witch, but deep down, I think she wants to be one too. I've caught her."

"Caught her trying to do magic?"

"Yeah. Come on. Let's see if we can find her."

Snape let go of her hands. They stood up and left the room. Harry followed after as they sneaked down the hall.

They stopped in front of a closed door. Lily put her ear to it and listened. "I don't think she's in there," she whispered.

Just then they heard giggling coming from downstairs. Then they heard a boy's voice. Lily looked shocked.

"She has a boy here."

"So do you," Snape reminded her.

"Yeah, but that's different. We're friends."

Snape looked hurt. Lily smiled, taking his hand and squeezing it. "I meant, she's a teenager; she shouldn't have boys here while she's supposed to be watching me."

"Yeah, but if she didn't have boys here, she'd know that I was here, and then she'd be bothering us."

"True," Lily said, but Snape wasn't listening. He was reaching for Petunia's door. "What are you doing?"

"I just want to look around. See what a non-magical, non-freak's room looks like."

Lily looked nervous, but smiled as she followed him into the room. It was definitely a teenage girl's room. Pink, powdery and smelling of flowery perfumes, with posters of flowers and animals on the walls and a framed photo of a tall, dark boy that Harry was sort of shocked wasn't Uncle Vernon on her bedside table. Harry had trouble imagining his aunt as anything but an adult shrew, but a shrew who had other boyfriends before Vernon Dursley seemed incomprehensible.

"This is disgusting," Snape said, taking in the entire room.

"Be nice, she's my sister."

"So?"

"So, family matters."

Snape shrugged. "I guess."

They rummaged through her room, Lily giggling at Snape's looks of horror when they found something overly feminine or ridiculous.

"Look," Snape said after going through her drawers.

"Severus! Get out of there," Lily admonished, closing the closet she had been perusing. "Those are her personal things."

"So are those," Snape retorted.

Lily ignored him and went to take the letter out of his hand.

"It's from Hogwarts," Snape said. She stopped and looked at the letter.

Dear Miss Evans...

Thank you so much for your letter. I must congratulate you on your ingenious means of getting it to me. I have of course received letters like yours in the past, but I dare say that was a first.

I understand your frustration at not receiving a similar letter to your sister's. We really have no idea how magic is delivered to one child and not another. However, we do know that when it is detected we must do everything in our power to foster and educate it. Unfortunately, we have yet to see magical properties in you. That of course does not mean they won't appear, just not at the present time. Therefore, an education at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry would not be in the best interest for you.

I will be in contact if magic ability becomes apparent in you. Again, thank you for your letter.

Albus Dumbledore

Headmaster

Lily put the letter down carefully and ignored Snape, who was doubled over on Petunia's bed in hysterics.

"Poor Petunia."

"P-P-Poor Petunia?" Snape sputtered between guffaws.

"That is the saddest thing I've ever read."

"Oh, I don't know; I imagine the letter she wrote was a bit more pathetic."

"Stop it. That's not nice."

He tried to stop laughing.

"Can't you imagine how she feels?" she asked.

"What do you mean?"

"Haven't you ever wanted something you couldn't have? Saw others get things that are denied to you?"

Snape seemed to sober finally. "Yes."

Harry and Lily were outside the Leaky Cauldron. It looked exactly like it did now, Harry thought. He followed Lily's eyes and saw Snape and a man who must be his father arguing across the street. They were too far away to hear, and by the look of Snape's face and the man's angry mug, Harry was glad for that.

Finally, Snape walked alone across the street to meet Lily.

"Everything all right?" she asked.

"Yeah, fine. Where are your parents?"

"Inside. They couldn't wait to see real witches and wizards close up."

Snape smiled before his expression darkened again. "Is your sister here?"

Lily shook her head. "She refused to come. Told us she didn't want to catch any of the freak disease."

"Yeah, I'm sure that's why she didn't want to come."

They shared a smile.

Walking into Diagon Alley behind his mother, his grandparents, and Snape, Harry knew that his mother was just as overwhelmed by it all as he had been that first time. The memory was vivid and rich with color and detail, something that had been lacking in her other memories. The streets exploded with color and activity, and he watched his mother take it all in excitedly. It was like reliving his own memories.

He didn't notice the signs on a lot of the windows telling passers-by that all was not right in the wizarding world until Lily did. Large posters announcing that He Who Must Not Be Named and his followers were on the loose and that caution was a necessity. It was odd to Harry that the same fear that he had known since entering the wizarding world had been shared by the generation before him. He had known about Voldemort's first reign of terror, everyone had told him, but he hadn't really thought about what that had meant.

"Who's that?" Lily asked Snape when she noticed the poster.

"Him? Just some nutter who is bent on world domination and purifying the bloodlines."

Lily swallowed.

Snape stood up taller. "Don't worry. You have nothing to worry about. I'll protect you."

Both Harry and Lily smiled at the boy's bravado, but then Harry spotted the large wizards flanking the group, unnoticed, as they continued down the street towards Gringotts. Aurors were everywhere. Harry could practically tell a person's blood status just by the amount of protection they had following them. Obviously, the Muggle-born families were being well protected, unbeknownst to them.

Harry was so intent on watching his mother react to this new environment for the first time and focused so acutely on what she was marveling at, that he didn't notice the things that were murky in her memory. Faces of strangers in the crowd appeared to all look alike, if they had faces at all and weren't just blobs of form and function. Every once in a while she would remember a particular person, but by the richness of the detail, he could tell it was because of what the person was wearing or carrying. He wondered if his memories would look similar.

Watching his grandfather trying to understand the exchange rate and what the new coins he was receiving meant reminded Harry of Arthur Weasley's similar fascinations with all things Muggle. In fact, watching the man bustle through Diagon Alley, following behind Snape and awed by all he saw, Harry thought his grandfather and Arthur would have been fast friends.

They went to Madame Malkin's, the bookshop and the Apothecary, where Snape showed off his knowledge of all things plant life. When Harry spotted other children in the shops and street, he began to keep his eye out for the familiar faces of his father and his friends. Then he realized that even if they were there...and really, what were the odds...they would just be another faceless blob in the crowd. If he knew anything of his parents' relationship, he knew that it definitely wasn't love at first sight, at least for his mother.

Their last stop was Ollivanders. "Ah, Severus, is it finally that time?" Mr. Ollivander said when he saw them.

Snape beamed. "Yes, sir."

"Who's this with you?"

"This is Lily Evans; she needs a wand too."

Harry noticed that he didn't introduce Lily's parents who stood behind him.

Mr. Ollivander bent over and began rummaging behind his counter. "Young Severus here has been coming to my shop for years to try just about every wand we have. Looking for the exact one. I told him there was a science to it and that the wand chooses the wizard. But he wouldn't be satisfied until he had tried every single one, isn't that right, boy?" He found the package he was looking for and presented it to Snape.

"How would you know for certain you had found the right one until you've had them all?" Snape asked earnestly, unwrapping and opening the box. Lily, Harry and Snape looked at the shiny new wand. Harry had of course seen it before, but not like this, not with the shine of untouched wood, not without the nicks and dings that came with years of use, not with unlimited magical possibilities practically vibrating its ebony shape.

"Most people trust their magic, trust their instincts," Ollivander said.

Snape looked at him as if this was the strangest logic he'd ever heard.

"Let's hope that Ms. Evans here is like *most* people."

He sized her up, studying her, almost as if he was trying to look inside her and reveal her true essence, feel her untapped magical properties. Knowing what he knew now, Harry wouldn't be surprised if that were exactly what he was doing. Thinking back on his own wand-purchasing experience, he had thought it all chance and lucky accidents, and of course a bit of fate.

When they left there, they made their way back to the Leaky Cauldron and their entrance back to the Muggle world. Lily looked around as if memorizing it all just in case she woke up the next day and all the magic was gone.

Walking out of the magical building, the Muggle streets looked drabber and more oppressive than they had going in. Lily looked disappointed, but as she scanned the street, she clutched Snape. His father was walking across the street, and he did not look happy, not at all. Harry recognized the expression from his years with Uncle Vernon, but unlike Uncle Vernon, Snape's father had no problem with making a scene.

Grabbing Snape by the ear, he began shouting, spittle flying from his frothing mouth. "How dare you keep me out here waiting while you go gallivanting about in that den of evilness! You think I got all day? You think I don't got better things to do? You think..."

"Sir, please control your..." Mr. Evans began, but stopped when the snarling man turned his glare on him.

"You stay out of this! I don't tell you how to treat your little... little... tramp! Walking the streets at all hours!" He stopped and let go of Snape with a painful shriek, his hand

starting to blister. With his unhurt hand, he struck Snape brutally across the face. "What have I told you about that, boy?"

Lily stood in front of Snape. "Severus didn't do it, I did. Don't you touch him."

Mr. and Mrs. Evans looked like they were frantic for some help as they both reached for their daughter. She shrugged them off.

It was Snape who got her to back down, putting his hand on her shoulder. "It's okay."

Lily continued to glare at Mr. Snape, who didn't take his eyes off of her.

The scene faded. Snape's dejected backwards gaze was the last thing she remembered.

They were leaving the train. The first look at his father Harry got in his mother's memories was her turning and glaring at him as she walked with Snape.

"I hate people like that!" Snape was saying. "They think they are so entitled because of the blood in their veins and the money in their pockets."

"I know, it's so repulsive," she agreed.

They turned around the bend in the road, and the castle loomed in the distance, the lake the only thing between them and it. Harry beamed invisibly as he saw Hagrid approach and separate the first-years. Lily took Snape's hand nervously. He squeezed it reassuringly, flashing her a small smile. They got on a boat as far away as possible from the loud boys that would soon call themselves Marauders and continued to ignore them for the rest of the trip and on into the castle.

Harry walked into the Hall with his mother, who was still clinging to Snape, and was overloaded with emotions when he saw familiar faces all around him. It seemed like everyone in that room would someday play a role in his life, for good or bad. There were future Ministry stooges, future Order of the Phoenix members, and in the corner, under a green and silver banner, future Death Eaters.

His mother's Sorting took longer than it had appeared to when Harry had watched that same moment in Snape's memories. He was right up there next to it this time and knew why: she was arguing with the Hat, just as Harry himself had.

"Please put me in Slytherin. I want to be with Severus."

"How do you know that is where he will be?" the Hat answered.

"I don't. Please, I don't care what house I'm in, just put me with him. I don't know anyone. I don't know anything."

Harry was shocked. She hadn't seemed to be that scared before. She had seemed confident and excited, but there, under the Hat, she was vulnerable and nervous, not very Gryffindor at all.

"Everything will be okay," the Hat soothed before it shouted out, "Gryffindor!"

She removed the Hat and looked sadly to Snape before going to the Gryffindor table, where Sirius already sat. He patted the seat next to him; she crossed her arms, turned up her nose and moved farther down the table, where she was swallowed by older students who welcomed her warmly.

The room faded before him.

They were walking down a hall, both of them older, more confident in their environment. Harry supposed they were in their third or fourth year. The halls were quiet but not deserted, and the windows revealed dusk was setting in. Harry was reminded that these were different times as people looked suspiciously around themselves from every corner. Boisterous Slytherins, led by a tall, handsome blond who looked so much like his son would in another lifetime, stormed down the halls, sneering at everyone they passed.

"Coming, Severus?" Malfoy asked over his shoulder as the group of boys passed Snape and Lily. Harry noticed his mother had instantly bristled when Lucius' eyes locked on hers, as if her skin were visibly crawling.

"Yeah, we're on our way," Snape answered.

Harry liked how Snape included Lily even though Lucius clearly had tried to pretend she wasn't there. But Harry wondered where they were going that Lily would be with a bunch of Slytherins. He didn't have long to wonder as they turned the corner and walked into the open doors of Professor Slughorn's private chambers.

The Slug Club, Harry groaned to himself. His mother was a member of the Slug Club. Of course she was. Wasn't Slughorn always singing her praises to Harry in his sixth year? Hadn't Slughorn made an exception from only inviting the most pure-blood, influential members for Hermione? So of course he would make an exception for Lily; probably Snape was an exception too. Chosen for their brilliance, not their lineage. Harry liked that.

It was somewhat reassuring to Harry to see that Slughorn was the same blowhard in this memory that he was in Harry's and in Tom Riddle's. Three generations of students he had tried to mold and had done nothing more than posture and become a laughingstock for those same students. In between Slughorn's name-dropping, there was actually discussion and debate. Harry was proud of his mother's ability to hold her own against the largely Slytherin group, most of whom tried to ignore her as if she weren't even in the room.

Harry once again remembered that he was in a different time where prejudices weren't hidden at all. Voldemort's reign was at its height, and many of the boys in this room were visible and proud supporters. Of course they ignored Lily; she was less than nothing. At least they weren't targeting her for torture. Well, not in this memory, anyway.

"Why do we go to that again?" Snape asked Lily in a whisper as they made their way out of the room.

Lily smiled and, in a pretty good imitation of Slughorn, said, "Proper connections are forged and strengthened in these halls that will do you well throughout your life."

"Yeah, like those people are ever going to be our friends."

"Well, they're your housemates."

"Don't remind me."

The scene faded again, and when it rematerialized, Harry was back on the now-familiar seedy street leading to Snape's with his mother, who looked to be about fifteen or sixteen now. It was dark and deserted, and she was making her way to Snape's home. If possible, the neighborhood looked even more seedy, and Snape's house even more unkempt. It was clear to Harry that no one in that house really wanted to be there.

Once again, Lily climbed the tree outside Snape's window effortlessly, and once again, Harry blinked and was in the room with them. It was dark and he couldn't see anything.

"Aren't we getting a little old for you to be coming to my bedroom every night?" Snape asked in the darkness.

"Maybe. Or maybe we are actually the *exact* right age for me to be here."

Harry groaned, worried that his mother was going to give him a memory that would burn his retinas for the rest of his life. But when Snape turned the light on, Harry and Lily both gasped. Harry was no longer even remotely worried that he'd be seeing scandalous behavior from his mother.

Snape's whole face was bloodied and swollen. His eye was black, his lip was split and his jaw bulged.

"Merlin! What happened?"

"Magic," Snape answered.

That seemed to be the only answer Lily needed. "Son of a bitch."

She came to the other side of the bed and slid onto it gently. Harry tried to ignore how naturally she did this, and instead focused on Snape's appearance. Lily touched his face gently, whispering soothing words.

"Is this all of it?" she asked after a moment.

"Yes."

She looked into his eyes for a moment. "Liar."

Reaching out, she took his shirt and eased it up. Harry saw more bruises, some only beginning to form, some that looked almost healed. Snape winced as he lifted his arms. As she very carefully worked the shirt off so as to save his face more pain, she cursed fluidly.

"Oh, Severus, how is this man still even alive? You have way more self-restraint than I do."

"Can't risk Azkaban. Not until I can make sure my mother is taken care of."

She took his face gently in her hands again and, with eyes glazed with tears, whispered a musical incantation that Harry couldn't clearly hear, but instantly recognized as the same healing song Snape had performed that time that Harry had accidentally almost killed Draco.

After a few minutes, Snape's eyes began to droop. Lily readjusted herself so that she could rest his head in her lap as she continued to soothe him with her words and her touch as he slowly drifted off to sleep.

The room faded right before Harry felt like falling asleep himself.

The memories that followed were a mosaic of scenes and moments shared between the two, bits and pieces of their lives together. Glimpses of them poring over a potions book and making notes, in dark alleys snogging, on brooms flying, in her room debating some point, and in his room with limbs tangled in all sorts of undress, all thankfully zoomed by one after the other in a jumbled mess.

When it finally stopped and focused on a particular moment, Harry groaned. Snape was across the lake being hung up by his ankles, and Lily was storming over to stick up for him. Harry knew this did not end well.

In Lily's memories, the "Mudblood" echoed and went on for a very long time as she stormed away from the crowd. Snape followed her, but she didn't acknowledge him or even look at him.

The next memory surprised Harry. It wasn't the one he had seen in Snape's memory, but something different. They were sitting in the library, alone, and the windows were all dark. At first, Harry thought that he had got the memories mixed up, because they were studying like nothing had happened. But as he got closer and heard them, he knew that it was in the right order.

"Lily, I said I was sorry. A hundred times, I've said I'm sorry. What more can I do?"

"This isn't about that. I can forgive you for what you said and still not think this is a good idea. You can't seriously think I would help you to invent a spell that could do this kind of damage."

She pointed down to a piece of parchment that Harry saw had scribbles in English and Latin along with illustrations. Harry knew instinctively that this was the blueprint that would someday soon become *Sectumsempra*.

She continued. "Haven't you learned anything? If you hadn't tried this on James, he might not have..."

"Don't try to condone their behavior..."

"I wasn't," she hissed. "But this has got to stop!"

"Do you really think this is about *them*? Can you think of no other reason I might need to protect myself? I can't always have you there to fight my battles. You've made that pretty clear."

"I can't win with you. I'm here with you, so I'm fighting your battles; I give you your space to make Slytherin friends, and I'm abandoning you and consorting with the enemy. What do you *want* from me?"

The scene faded with them looking at each other, neither of them talking, Snape seemingly unable to answer the question.

Now they were in a meadow, the town of Hogsmeade down the hill and the shadow of Hogwarts above them.

"Come with me," Snape was saying. His arms were around Lily who was standing with her back against his chest, their hair blowing in the early summer wind.

"I can't, I have to take the train with the other students."

"I don't mean that, I mean after. After you get in to London, let's get away; see the world before we have to come back here for one more tedious year."

"Oh, Sev, I wish I could. But it's not safe."

"I'll protect you."

"And who will protect you?"

After a moment, Snape seemed to forget the question. "I love you, Lily Evans."

"I love you too, Severus Snape. No matter what." The way she was standing, Snape couldn't see the look of sadness on her face, the look that said she knew their paths were diverging already, the look that tried to fight off their upcoming separation.

After a moment, she turned and kissed him desperately, and thankfully for Harry, the scene faded. When it rematerialized this time, it was drastically different.

They were on the Hogwarts Express platform. It was the same day; they were wearing the same clothes.

"I said no, Severus."

"For a few days, a week at the most."

They were walking down the platform through the crowd, Lily slightly ahead of Snape.

"I can't go anywhere with you," she hissed over her shoulder, obviously trying to avoid a scene.

"With me? Oh, I get it. If it was the pretty boys of Gryffindor tower..."

"Leave them out of this."

"I wish I could."

She turned on him, rage tingeing her cheeks and sparking in her eyes.

"I cannot keep having this conversation with you. Jesus! Don't you see? Haven't you figured it out? We," she pointed back and forth between her chest and his, "don't work anymore. I'm not what you want, what you need."

"What are you talking about? You're all I ever think of, all I've ever wanted."

"No. Not anymore." She looked around. "Can we talk about this later?"

He grabbed her bicep and spun them both around, Apparating.

"Okay, now tell me what you meant by that!" he commanded.

They were at the playground, the one in which they had first met.

She wrenched her arm out of his grasp. "Don't you ever take me where I don't want to go!"

"I'm sorry. But you can't just start a conversation like that and then say can we talk later."

She didn't respond to that, just began pacing.

"Lily, talk to me," Snape pleaded. "What has changed between us? Is this still about the Mudblood comment? When are you finally going to forgive..."

"It's not that. Well, not entirely that. I forgave you for calling me that a long time ago. But Severus, come on. You called me that for a reason."

"I was angry. I felt emasculated."

She came back to stand in front of him. "I know. I didn't mean for you to feel that way. But it's more than that. You're angry all the time. You're changing every day, and I can't help you. I can't be what you want me to be. You say you don't think that way about Muggles and Muggleborns, not the way that your fellow housemates do."

He took both of her hands in his. "I don't. You're my best friend and the only person I've ever loved. How could you think I hate what you are?"

"Because you hate what *you* are."

"What?" he asked, pulling to remove his hands. She held on.

"You hate your father, and you hate the bit of him in you, the Muggle part of you *Half-Blood Prince*. So there will always be a part of you that hates me. That hates what I am."

"That's ridiculous," he said, but he turned away to hide his face.

"Is it?" she whispered.

The scene blurred as if Harry was seeing it through Lily's tearful eyes. When it cleared, he was standing beside his mother. They were on a hill. The wind was warm in a late summer evening, and the sun was just beginning to set. Not too far away, Harry saw a gathering of people, all in black, surrounding a casket that was just being lowered into the ground. There were a few Muggles, but most of the people gathered around the site wore wizard's robes. Snape was in the middle.

The Muggles there must think Snape and his friends have joined the priesthood Harry thought as he began to recognize the men around Snape. The silvery blond of Lucius and the black ponytail of Regulus were on the two extremes, but they were all there, all the men who would soon be terrorizing Muggles and the wizarding world with Voldemort, if they hadn't already begun.

For a moment, Harry wondered who was being lowered into the ground, but then Snape bent and helped to her feet a woman that could only be his mother. So it was the funeral of his father. Lily sniffed beside him, but he was sure it wasn't tears for the man in the box.

"Severus," she called as she made her way down the hill after the crowd began to dissipate.

For a minute, Harry was sure he wasn't even going to turn around and acknowledge her, but then he did and Harry's blood ran cold. "Lily."

It might have only been a few months since the last memory, but the changes were marked. This was the Severus Snape that Harry knew. There was a chill in every move he made, in his very glance.

Lily faltered for a moment. "I just...well..." She swallowed and tried again. "I should say sorry, but that sounds ridiculous."

"Yes, rather. We're going out to celebrate; would you like to join us?"

"No."

"Of course not." He turned.

"Severus," she called again.

"Yes?" He turned back, as if resigned.

"Did you...was it...?"

"Remember how I used to be weak, how I used to be cowed and abused? Remember how you used to sing your soothing songs and try to fix me up, how we promised to protect each other?"

"Yes. I remember, I remember it all."

"Now do you remember when I came to you, asked for your help to defend myself and you recoiled? You, of all people, who saw what he did to me, what I was powerless to stop. Well, now I don't need your help. I don't need you telling me everything will be all right in your sing-song voice. I take care of myself now."

"I'm sorry."

"Coming, Severus?" Lucius called from across the field, where the rest of the Death Eaters stood.

"Yes," he called back. Then he turned to Lily. "Take care of yourself, okay? And I'll take care of myself."

She watched him walk away before she crumpled to the ground with a sob.

Harry stood there for a long time, watching his mother cry, and could do nothing to comfort her. He wondered why she had shown him these particular memories. He had thought he knew everything from what Snape had showed him, but he hadn't really even scraped the surface of what his history with Lily was. *And why would he?* Harry asked himself. *He gave me what I needed, nothing more.*

When the scene finally faded, the one that replaced it made Harry's breath catch. She was older, much more mature, and in her arms was a small bundle of baby *him*. She rocked him and sang him a lullaby. Harry got closer so that he could see himself and hear what his mother was saying to him.

"One day you will understand it all."

She took out her wand and levitated a small bottle by her side to the same chest he had just discovered in his vault.

"One day I hope to tell you all the things you want to know. I wish to tell you about how the world works, to be there beside you shopping for your Hogwarts supplies, buying your first broom. I want to be there when the first girl tries to win your heart and when you get in your first fight. I want to give you brothers and sisters to play with and terrorize."

Now the tears that were blurring Harry's vision were his own. Why was life so cruel?

"Now you will ask, why these memories? It is true what I wrote. I do want you to know the real me. There's other reasons though. The most important is this: you can't save people from themselves. They are the only ones who can do that. All you can be is the best friend, lover, family that you can be, and be there in any way you can. In the end, other's choices are not yours to make."

The baby in her arms began to fuss. She lifted him to her eyes, and after a moment, he stilled, as if mesmerized by those emerald eyes, so like his own.

"The other thing I wanted to tell you might not seem as important, but I hope you will find the advice valuable. It is possible to have more than one love of your life. That even if the first one isn't ultimately *the one*, it doesn't mean that you will ever need to completely stop loving them, or that you won't find love again when it's right. Trust your heart."

She kissed the perfect, scarless baby on the forehead, on each cheek, his nose and lips, then started all over before looking at him again. Harry wanted to reach out and touch his mother, to feel her lips on his grown forehead and to be cradled in her arms.

"And remember, no matter what, no matter where, I will always love you. Always."

Harry walked out of the office and out of Hogwarts in a daze. Once again he was filled with memories that weren't his, yet these belonged to him more than any other possession he owned.

What he needed was a drink in a quiet place. Too drained to Apparate yet, he made his way to the Hog's Head, hoping it would be deserted on this random weeknight. Thankfully it was, and he drained two pints while he thought about all he had seen. He hadn't even begun to sort it out by the time he made his way out, but he reasoned he'd have a lifetime to go over it. If only he had someone to share these new images with.

Wrapped in his thoughts, he didn't see the person turning the corner until they were tumbling over him, taking him with them in a tangle of limbs and papers.

"Oh!" they both exclaimed, then Harry saw who it was.

"Luna, I'm so sorry. I didn't see you."

"That's okay, I didn't see you either. I guess I was too wrapped up in my own thoughts, but then, what else is new?"

Harry laughed. "Right. How have you been? What are you doing here?"

They both got back to their feet and began to pick up Luna's papers.

"I had a meeting with the Headmistress about a visiting professorship next year. And I've been fine, you?"

"Oh, great. I was just up at the school... um... well... actually..." Before he fully knew what he was doing, he told her all about what he had been doing; not the details, as that would take too long, but about his mother and her long-lost gift to him.

She stood there on the sidewalk of a dark street of Hogsmeade listening to him. When he was done, she put her papers in her bag. Then, very gently, but in completely spontaneous Luna fashion, she embraced Harry tightly.

He returned the hug, feeling something he hadn't felt in a very long time...companionship.

"What a treasure she has given you," Luna said, still holding him.

"Yes. A real treasure."