

Lily Between the Lines

by Amita

A conversation with a famous lady.

Chapter 1 of 1

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I opened the book.

"Nothing here but what nobody else wants," the caretaker had told me. "The family mementos of the most famous wizard of the last age have been picked over by everyone."

"I'm looking for something new," I had said.

"Aren't they all," he had replied. "Digging for another tidbit if they want to glorify him. Searching for a piece of dirt if they're after an expose."

I had taken the crate anyway. I hadn't told the caretaker I was a distant descendant and my reasons were sentimental. Now, it was a cold and rainy Friday night after a long week: the ideal prelude to an evening in front of the fireplace with a glass of sherry and a book of photographs and pressed flowers that would make no demands. I was too tired to give even such an innocuous pastime its due and was merely flipping through the book. The photographs and flowers barely registered. But I did keep coming back to one page: a page with a pressed lily. *Lily*, I thought.

"Is anyone there?" asked a voice.

"By the gods," I blurted out.

"By the gods, indeed," said the voice.

"Lily?" I asked. "It can't be you."

"Is there something that prevents it?" asked a sardonic voice. "I was torn violently from this earth, you know."

"I have heard that a lingering ghost is an aftereffect of that," I admitted.

"Yes, lingering. Yes, aftereffect. How nicely you describe me."

"I'm sorry. I apologize. I wasn't ready for this," I stumbled out. "You're the most honored among women: the mother of the famous Harry Potter."

"Honored?" she asked.

"You stood between the Dark Lord and your son; your death called up the Old Magic that gave your son the protection he needed to resist the Dark Lord," I said.

"That diminishes me," said Lily.

"How could it possibly do that?" I asked.

"It is one thing to give your life knowing your cause will triumph because of it. It is more daunting to give your life on principle when it appears to be a wasted effort," said Lily.

"But you did give your life on principle," I said. "You didn't know your sacrifice would invoke ancient powers."

"Now that you mention it, I recall it was that way. It was a long time ago, and I've been a dried flower," she said. She continued, "You mentioned Old Magic."

"Ancient blood magic that protected your son when nothing else could," I replied.

"Then we have deteriorated," she said. "If no wizard could stand up to the Dark Lord except by calling up older magic, then the older stuff was stronger. Our craft has become conjuror tricks."

I found that thought uncomfortable and changed the topic. "I can show you the memorial to your son."

"One should not live to bury one's children, not even as a ghost from a book."

I waited, wondering if I had offended her spirit.

"Maybe later," she said, "when I've had time to adjust."

Talking to Lily was making me a bit giddy, and I thoughtlessly rambled on. "Your son had a permanent scar on his forehead; he was raised by your sister and her family; he went to Hogwarts."

"He had the mark of the beast; he was raised by people who hated him," said Lily. "My poor son. He must have turned out terrible."

"All the accounts are that he was a brave, noble, and kind person," I said.

Lily seemed to shake her head. "History written by the winners says the winners were wonderful people."

"I don't think he's remembered as perfect," I said. "And he did vanquish the Dark Lord."

Lily sounded sad. "Our whole society is ineffective: it depends on a hero to save it."

Lily's comment on past wizard society reminded me of present wizard society. I hurried on. "Not all those on the right side were always good. James Potter and his friends were rascals when they were in school."

Lily smiled. "They were rascals when they were out of school, too."

"But you married him," I said.

"I was the golden girl, and I paid the price. Most people didn't see me as a person. Who would have me, a rich old man as a trophy wife? Only a bad boy could see me as another girl." She paused. "He was attractive, and he was exciting. And I thought I had reformed him, which is a heady experience for a young girl."

"Didn't he love you?" I asked.

"He was infatuated with me – for a while. But James was a bad boy, and Sirius was worse. Sirius would have eventually led him astray. I was waiting for the day when I would turn to Sirius or Remus for consolation. Or it might have come to his offering me to them to get me out of his hair. We were murdered before any of that happened."

"Saved by tragedy," I ventured.

"Yes, you could say that."

"Or kept from excitement by tragedy," I said, wondering if I had ventured too far.

Can a flower chuckle? "I was a wilder girl than they realize, and his friends *were* handsome."

"And you liked bad boys," I added.

"I was such a proper lady – on the outside. And proper ladies want to be led astray. Don't ever let anyone tell you differently," she said.

I thought about my own plight of righteous loneliness. "That's better than me. I can't attract boys at all."

She gave a ghostly snort.

"When in disgrace with romance and men's eyes

You all alone bewail your sorry art,

Trouble us not with your worthless cries,

For not one of us will give a fart."

"That was brilliant," I said.

"Do you really think so?" she asked.

"Absolutely," I said. "No wonder you were Head Girl."

"You were even a friend to Severus Snape," I added.

"A friend to Severus? He was too full of himself to notice others. Wait, that's not it. It was the opposite. He didn't have enough of himself to notice others."

"But he was brokenhearted when you married James. In his despair he pointed you out to the Dark Lord and spent the rest of his life repenting."

There was the saddest whisper from the flower. "It was Severus?"

Omigod, I thought, *what have I done?* I hastened to another topic. "Lily-and-Severus is one of the great unrequited-love stories of our age," I said. "He never loved again."

"He never loved again? Is that what they say? Romantic fools. He never loved the first time. Not enough in him." She paused. "And you say he was the one who pointed us out to the Dark Lord. You don't betray your true love, no matter what." She paused again. "What a foolish girl I was: some people will only hurt you."

"He may have performed one redeeming act," I said.

"Did a woman ask a favor of him?" asked Lily. "That might pierce his façade."

"He saved a woman's son," I said.

"Maybe he found a little peace," she said. There was a hoarse, "I need to rest." A pause. "Will you come back?"

"Yes," I said.

"Please do, I need to find peace."

I closed the book.

The prompt is from DawnEB: An unusual flower found pressed between the pages of an old book.