

# Grace

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*Chapter 1 of 1*

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*Grace is a gift given that is undeserved. A promise that has no strings.*

Lily watched the transformation in the mirror. She stared without expression as first her hair then her face was adorned. She was getting ready in the church, the children's rooms. For a moment she looked around at the drawings and craft pieces created by the children and looked up at the blue netting hung near the ceiling with paper fish hanging from it. She smiled a genuine grin, but it didn't last, twisted as it was by her nerves. They would be married outside in the gardens. She wasn't sure what bothered her about that; she told herself she was being silly. Her mind was drifting over the past. Since James had asked her to marry him, her pleasure had been dampened by thoughts of the past, regrets and unfinished business. Things unsaid that needed to be. If only her parents could be there. If only Severus had answered her owls...

*Otherwhere...*

There it sat. Unopened in the middle of his desk. A single candle sat next to it, casting shadows over the dark room. How could a pink envelope seem so menacing? He sat in his chair and opened a drawer. Inside were her letters; he hadn't been able to open any of them. Except one. The only one that she hadn't sealed in an envelope. He had read that one. He pulled it out now. There were holes in the paper, pieces lost when he had ripped it up only to repair it later. It was from her; no matter its content, he couldn't throw it out.

**Dear Severus,**

**It has been so long and so much has happened since we last spoke. Please. I know we are on separate sides, but can't you even pick up a quill and send me a short note? I just want to know you're ok. I want to understand how and why you could betray our friendship so completely. Do you truly have so little regard for me? I'm sorry, I just... I need to know why, I'm confused. Please.**

**As you know, if you've read my other letters, I'm dating James now. He is such a good man; you have a lot in common with him. I think you could have been great friends under different circumstances. I know neither of you would agree. He's asked me to marry him, Sev. He asked me Tuesday. I'm planning to say yes. I'll be Mrs Lily Potter. Can you imagine it? But before I do, we need to talk. Please, Severus. If I hear from you or not, I'm going to give James my reply Monday.**

**Your friend,**

**Lily Evans**

He set the letter on the desk next to the pink envelope and leaned back, ignoring his chair's groan of protest. He might have written back, he might have tried to talk her out of it if it wasn't for the traces left on the paper where she had struggled to sign it. If it hadn't been obvious that she wanted to make it clear they were just friends. If there had

been the slightest chance of something more. Without moving from his reclined position, keeping his eyes closed, he reached out and walked his fingers over the desk and picked up the envelope. Pushing a finger under the flap, he broke the seal and pulled out the card. He squinted at the sickeningly sweet decorations and the flowing script spelling, *'You are invited to the wedding of James Potter and Lily Evans...'*

*The Church...*

"All done!"

Lily smiled and paraded herself for her admiring bridesmaids, all the time her mind elsewhere. The door creaked behind her, and before she could turn to see the intruder, she was swept off her feet and swung round in a circle in an embrace. Set back on her feet, she was surprised to recognise her fiancé's best man.

"Sirius! What..."

Sirius grinned. "I'm just so happy for James. And you," he explained. He turned and walked back to the door.

"We aren't married yet! It's a bit early for congratulations," Lily called after him, amused and more than a little confused.

Sirius shrugged and looked back over his shoulder as he opened the door. "I feel like I'm about to explode!" he exclaimed before bounding out the door. His voice drifted back through the open door. "You look beautiful, by the way!"

Lily shook her head. You'd think he was the one marrying James. Her bridesmaids clustered around her, exclaiming Sirius's rudeness and telling her that she was indeed beautiful. All except one, who stood back and stared at her with lips pursed in disapproval.

Lily met the eye of Jess, her maid of honour, and she followed Lily's gaze to the lone maid. Understanding, she ushered the others out to take their positions for the walk down the aisle.

As she turned to follow the others, Lily called to Petunia quietly, "Pet, I've been meaning to talk to you."

Petunia stopped and stood stiffly as the others left the room, the last closing the door behind her.

"Why did you agree to be my bridesmaid if you hate the idea so much?" Lily asked softly.

"Why did you ask?" Petunia challenged irritably.

"You're my sister. I love you, Pet."

Petunia turned around to face Lily, her eyebrows knitted into a frown. She said nothing, but she no longer held her shoulders so stiffly.

"I'm glad you're here," Lily said, searching Petunia's face for a reaction.

Petunia crossed her arms but her expression softened slightly. "You were supposed to come back."

"I don't understand, Pet..."

"Don't call me that! You were supposed to come back. Magic was supposed to make life easier. But you never did. You abandoned us for these freaks and now mum and dad are dead and it's your fault!" Petunia stood defiantly with her hands balled into fists.

Lily staggered as if Petunia had hit her. "No, no Pet...Petunia, you don't...they wouldn't accept magical protection. There's too much... there was nothing we could do..."

"You could have been there! You could have stayed out of it! Better yet, you could have died in their place!"

"Don't you think I would have?"

Petunia shook her head in disbelief. "Would you? It was done to hurt you, they died to hurt you yet you still live."

"If you blame me, if you hate me so much, why did you come? Was it just to hurt me? I know it's my fault, I should have made them leave..." Lily sank to the floor and sobbed, her face in her hands. She felt a warm hand on her shoulder.

"They wouldn't have gone," Petunia said quietly, pulling away when Lily put her hand on her own. "I should go, I don't belong here."

"No, please. Don't go like this."

"I hate magic, Lily. I don't want to hate you."

That said, Petunia left. Lily listened as she heard her enter a conversation of harsh whispers outside the door. It ended abruptly and James's voice called,

"Get out of here then!"

The door opened and James stood there. The sight of him staring down at her in concern brought a smile to her face.

"You shouldn't be here, it's bad luck," she said as he came in and sat down next to her, drawing her into his arms.

"So is being late for your own wedding."

"Am I?"

"Maybe two lots of bad luck cancel each other out. I was beginning to wonder if I would find this room empty. Sirius was offering to drag you in there kicking and screaming if need be."

Lily laughed. She sighed and leaned into him. "How could saying the words change anything? I feel like we're already married."

"That's a relief to hear." After a pause, he leaned back and added, "I think saying the words is purely for the entertainment of family and friends. We could both run away now and declare ourselves married." James looked up at the ceiling and added, "Or we could get married under the sea."

Lily shook her head with a laugh. She stood up and offered her hands to James. "Let's say the words."

James allowed himself to be pulled to his feet. "Are you ok?"

Lily sighed and nodded.

"Let's get married," she said with a grin.

*Outside...*

Severus Snape stared up at the sky. *It's a beautiful day, not a cloud in the sky*, he thought bitterly. Despite the heat, he pulled his cloak tighter, checking his hood for the fifth time in as many minutes to make sure it still covered his head. He leant against a tree, staring at the small gathering of people across the road in the churchyard. He tensed as the music struck up and stood straighter as his rival appeared. His breath caught at the sight of her. His heart jumped and almost stopped when she looked his way. But then she turned away. Slipping her arm in his, Lily walked away from Severus and down the aisle with James Potter.

*Later...*

After the ceremony, Lily managed to slip away and walked alone under the trees. She heard a twig snap behind her and said without turning, "I saw you. I wasn't sure, but I think I knew it was you all along."

Severus said nothing. He just let his eyes drink in the sight of her.

Lily sighed, finally turning to face him. "Why are you here, Severus? You never answered one of my letters. Were you sent to remind us that your master is out there? To ruin the happiest day of my life?"

Severus flinched as if she had slapped him. "No, Lily it's not... happiest day? You really love *him* then?"

"Yes. We have all grown up, some more than others I must admit, but James is not the arrogant boy you knew at school. Not anymore." After studying Severus's expression a moment, she added gently, "Severus, we were never more than friends."

She had always been able to read him, she was the only one who could, and without magic.

"I shouldn't have come. I know, how could you..." He couldn't bring himself to finish that sentence. He turned around to leave.

"I'm glad you did."

Severus froze. Hope blossomed in his chest.

"I'm sorry, Severus. I'm sorry our paths have gone in such opposite directions. I'm sorry I couldn't bring myself to forgive you sooner. I do forgive you. But... all our years of friendship. You helped me understand my powers, we learnt together. You were my best friend, and you threw it away for the look of the thing. I thought I knew you but I see what you have become... I never really knew you at all, did I?"

Severus stared at the ground, his hope dashed. She didn't understand. She didn't know how afraid he had been at school; he hadn't been able to convince her back then of how truly terrible the Dark Lord was. But now she knew too. *And she would never have given in as you did,* a treacherous voice whispered in his mind.

"Goodbye, Severus."

She was walking away. Severus watched her go, aching to call her back, to make her understand, but he couldn't. He didn't deserve her, as friend or... lover.

Instead he whispered so she could not hear as she left him once and for all, "I do it for you. I'll get close to him, into his inner circle, to keep you safe."