

Love, Lily

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Severus Snape knelt on the floor of Sirius Black's bedroom in number twelve, Grimmauld Place, surrounded by torn books. Loose pages and ripped covers littered the floor. To a bibliophile such as himself this would normally be sacrilege, (although the manual for that ridiculous motorcycle was no loss) but he was desperate.

There had to be something here he could take. He couldn't believe Black had had nothing, and it wasn't as if he needed any of it now anyway. Eventually, having ransacked the chest of drawers, the bedside cabinets and the stack of cardboard boxes at the bottom of the wardrobe, Severus opened the old writing desk which had stood in the drawing room two years ago and had apparently caused Molly Weasley so much distress with its resident Boggart.

He rifled through the haphazard piles of parchment which seemed to constitute Black's filing system, noting, with a flash of contempt, the receipt and order form for Potter's Firebolt.

Severus was growing frustrated now, and although he'd never admit it, a little panicked. He didn't know how long he'd have before someone turned up here and discovered him. All of the Order had access to the building; he had already been here long enough to search the drawing room and spare bedroom, and he was sure that cursed house-elf was still skulking about somewhere.

But he couldn't bear to leave empty-handed, not after the trouble it had caused him to get in here he hadn't enjoyed having to justify himself to the ghost of Albus Dumbledore. Even though it was just a jinx, it had obviously been put here to give him a nasty shock if he turned up. It had worked.

Then, just as he was thinking of giving up entirely, he spotted a yellowing envelope, written in a gut-wrenchingly familiar hand. His own hands shaking, he took out the letter and scanned it. The first page was of no use to him it was addressed to Black and was full of references to Potter and his blasted father. But the second page contained only two lines and then her girlishly flamboyant signature. He laid it gently, almost reverently, on the floor beside him, the beginnings of a pile of mementos to take.

Severus was about to abandon the writing desk in favour of searching a different room, when he noticed there was a third piece of paper in the envelope. It turned out to be the photograph described in the letter. Lily was sitting cross-legged on the floor, laughing up at the camera, watching her baby son zoom in and out of shot on a tiny broomstick. As he stared at the photograph, Severus felt tears prick the backs of his eyes and a horrible, constricted feeling grip his throat. Blinking furiously, he tried to focus on the picture again.

'I never liked my hair in that photo, you know,' a voice said, conversationally, behind him.

Severus whipped round with a yell of shock, feeling all the colour drain from his face as he saw who had spoken.

The ghost of Lily was standing beside the four-poster, at least, he assumed it was her ghost, but she wasn't pearly-white like the Hogwarts spirits. She simply looked like a less substantial version of herself. Her hair was dark red, just as he remembered it, and her eyes, her beautiful eyes, were bright green and smiling at him.

She leant over his shoulder and studied the photograph.

'It needed cutting, but I never was any good at cosmetic charms. I probably would've ended up giving myself a Mohican.'

'What are... how... you *can't* be...'

Severus was normally devastatingly articulate, as sixteen years' worth of terrified students would no doubt attest, but at the moment it was all he could do to stop himself from passing out. Constructing a coherent sentence was beyond him.

'I wanted to talk to you,' Lily said, answering his unasked question. 'I wanted to thank you for all you've done for Harry.'

A dull red flush spread over his face and he looked down at his hands, which were balled so tightly into fists, his knuckles were going white.

'I've been a bastard to your son.' He couldn't lie to her, couldn't pretend, he never had been able to.

'Well, yes,' she conceded, 'you have rather. But you've protected him for years; you've risked your life to keep him safe. I'm grateful, Severus, really I am.'

He didn't raise his eyes from his lap. 'I had no choice. I look on it as payment for... for what I did.' His voice tailed off, miserably.

'Ah. I'm still not sure how I feel about that. But you've spent the whole of your life punishing yourself. I'm not going to do the same.'

Lily knelt down in front of him and touched his cheek. Surprisingly, it didn't feel uncomfortable, as it did when one of the Hogwarts ghosts touched you; it felt cooling and calming against his flushed skin. He finally raised his eyes to hers.

'I'm sorry we fell out, Sev,' Lily whispered.

Severus gave a start at the pet name he hadn't heard in over twenty years, blinking back the tears that still threatened.

'You don't need to apologise. I was the one who insulted you. I'm the one who's sorry.'

'I'm sorry I didn't accept your apology at the time. I should have done, but... I don't know... it wasn't the *word* that upset me, really, it was what it signified. I was scared of you, Severus. I was scared of who you were turning into, where you were heading. And I was right to be, wasn't I?'

'After we 'fell out' there seemed little point in resisting it. I knew I had lost you. I tried so hard to apologise, and I couldn't get through to you.'

'I was hurt. And I suppose it was that word which upset me. I couldn't believe that you, my best friend, could throw that at me. You told me when we were kids that being Muggle-born didn't matter. I took it as a sign of how much you'd changed that you obviously thought it did.'

He didn't answer. There didn't seem to be anything he *could* say, so he stared at the floor again.

'I loved you, Severus. I really did and I felt you'd betrayed me.'

Now he looked up, his heart pounding in his throat so that he could hardly swallow.

'I thought you hated me.'

Lily sighed. 'Oh, Sev, there's a fine line between love and hate. *You* know that. And I did hate you for a while. Quite a long time, actually. By the time I'd grown up enough to realise what really made you say it, I was... going out with James and I couldn't approach you.'

At the sound of her husband's name, Severus had flinched and looked away. Lily turned his face back towards her and he felt the same gentle breeze against his skin as he had when she touched him before.

'James is sorry too, Severus.'

He shook his head. 'James really did hate me.'

She smiled at him, almost indulgently, as a mother might when faced with an obtuse child. 'We've all grown up since then, Sev.'

'Did you really love me?' His eyes brimming with tears, he formed the question he never thought he'd be able to ask her.

Lily nodded, holding his gaze. 'I just wasn't *in* love with you. And I'm sorry for that too. I know you were with me.'

A tear rolled down his cheek and when he spoke his voice was hoarse. 'I still am. I always will be.'

'I know. There's no point telling you to move on, is there? Because I know you never will.'

Tears were falling thick and fast now into his lap. He couldn't stop them, and he turned his face away, unable to keep on looking at her.

Lily leaned over and gently kissed his cheek. This time it was *her* voice that cracked slightly. 'I have to go. Goodbye, Sev, and... thank you... again.'

She stood up abruptly, then stopped and seemed to be considering something.

'Oh, and Sev? Keep the photo. I don't suppose you've got any, have you?'

He folded up the page of the letter, tucking it inside his robes. Then he ripped the photograph in two and threw the part showing Harry and James to the floor, where it fluttered under the chest of drawers.

Lily laughed. 'Oh, Severus. You don't change do you?'

The last thing he heard was her gentle laughter, fading away, leaving him kneeling on the dusty carpet surrounded by torn books, tears still pouring down his face.

A/N: My contribution to the 'Missing Scene' genre.

The descriptions of the sensation of being touched by a ghost are from Noel Coward's 'Blithe Spirit'.