

Elevator Love Letter

by seinde

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Yesterday, Lily Evans was fine.

She rearranged the living room to fit the new armchair, made a quiet dinner for James, and ate it alone when he sent word he would be working late. Lily then picked out an off-white shirt with little blue flowers and black skirt she'd wear the next day. She calmly thought about her day as she lay awake in bed.

Lying sleepless beside her dreaming fiance, her mind wondered in circles about their new house, their new furniture, their new life. Their love was a rare flower in a world that grew beauty out of dead land, and she felt she ought to be grateful for it. She would not let her small itching annoyance with domesticity spoil their happiness...she was more than a simple housewife; of course she was.

Everything was as it should have been.

However, morning rolled around, and Lily found herself waking ten minutes later than usual. James had already gone and left her a vague note which she threw in the waste basket without a second thought. As if her minor disregard of time had jarred the day, the morning moved faster than she could keep up. Right as the clock struck ten, she was running down the streets of London toward a red telephone booth, ten minutes late again.

The telephone booth took what seemed to be an eternity to reach the bottom. Once inside the Ministry, she dashed through the atrium toward a receptionist desk at the end, dark red hair disturbed by haste, spilling out from her jeweled hair clip. The witch behind the desk adjusted her thick glasses and pointed toward a man standing by a large golden gate. Lily tried her hardest to look charming and thankful.

Late! These languid people were going to make her even later!

She'd always prided herself on being prompt, if nothing else. Her parents had taught her manners, and to make someone wait was to insult them. And today was certainly not the day to be tardy. She had important, life-changing business here.

The witch quickly ran over the badly-shaven man and presented her wand with shaky hands. The gentleman took her wand and recorded its specifications in a painfully slow manner. She smiled nervously, heart pounding as her blood pressure rose through the roof. How could he not notice that she was in a hurry? When he handed it back, Lily snatched it up anxiously and shot through the gate toward the lifts.

One of the lifts was closing its doors just as she arrived at the metal row. She skidded against the slick marble floor as she flew toward the buttons and frantically punched

the less-than sign.

"Wait!" she shouted, hoping the people inside would open the door for her.

A black shadow moved out of the shrinking vertical crack, and she cursed her luck. It was so typical that every little thing was against her today; now she would have to wait for another car and add even more minutes to her already atrocious delay. Slumping against the dark wall, she shifted her weight onto her right foot, preparing for the wait.

To her surprise, the lift which had shut her out opened its doors again. There seemed to be only one person, hanging around the left corner. Lily stumbled into the car immediately. She then turned to thank whoever had been so gracious to wait for her. Still flustered, she tucked messy hair behind her ear as to look more presentable before she greeted her savior.

"Thank you," she said, breathless, then raised her eyes.

Green met cold black and she froze.

The young man standing opposite of her was equally shocked. His long face was ghostly pale, but his dark eyes were glittering wildly. Long fingers gripped the bar behind him for support as he parted his thin lips to draw in a long breath. Lily held herself stiffly as she took a step back to lean against the opposite wall. She hoped that he would be getting off soon so they would not have to converse. To her chagrin, she discovered he was headed to level one as well when she went to push the yellowing button. Neither of them heard the ding that sounded when the door closed.

Heartbeat speeding up again, Lily stared at the young man. He was taller than she remembered but gave off the same thin, shadowy aura. She felt unable to speak or look away. Part of her felt dread and annoyance at meeting him again; part of her wanted to hug him excitedly and ask how he was. At the same moment, they both averted their gazes and stood in awkward silence listening to the cranking of metal gears.

"Hello, Severus," she finally said, incapable of continuing in the discomfort.

The black-haired wizard jerked his head up sharply upon hearing her voice. He crossed his arms and slouched his narrow shoulders against the lift wall. Severus's long greasy hair hung limply in his face as he moved his tongue without opening his mouth. After considering her with many small, lingering glances, he replied, "Hello, Lily."

The two continued to bite their lips at each other, despite having broken the silence.

Lily fidgeted with her hair clip trying to recapture wind-swept red strands, grateful that she had something to do aside from stare.

"You look beautiful. Your hair," Severus suddenly blurted out. His cheeks colored, revealing that he had not meant for that bit to slip out.

Caught off guard, Lily lowered her hands and stammered, "Oh...um...thanks yeah." She swung her weight onto one foot and tilted her head to fix her gaze on him. Lifting her purse straps to sit more on her shoulders, she smiled lightly. Severus took in her smile greedily, and his lips twitched slightly at the corners in response.

The lift screeched to a halt, and the door opened on level seven. Thankful for a reprieve, Lily trained her gaze on the opening doors. A flock of memos flew in, filling the car with the rough crackling of parchment against parchment. No one entered. Both young people looked edgy and uptight as the door shut again.

Despite there being more noise, the air was still tense. Level one could not come soon enough.

"Are you well?" Lily ventured small talk.

Severus returned, "As well as can be." He sounded rather non-committal and pulled his shoulders back to stand a little taller.

"That's good to hear. Mum asks about you sometimes, and I never know what to say. I'm sure she'll be glad to hear you are well."

"Does she now?" He raised an eyebrow.

"Yes."

An uneasy silence drifted between them again.

Suddenly, the lift shook violently, causing the two to lose their balance. The metal room rocked back and forth a few times then stopped moving altogether. The paper memos above their heads all fell to the ground without warning. Lily's almond eyes were wide with bewilderment as she glanced up. She held the rail tightly, preparing for another tremble.

"Blast, we're stuck," Severus pronounced as he punched the buttons to no effects.

"Oh, Merlin," Lily whispered in response as she, too, tried the glass-covered buttons.

"I wouldn't worry; they'll come for us."

Grasping her robes close, she turned to him with a worried look. "Do you think it will be soon?"

The young wizard shook his head and Lily sighed. She slid down against the rail and folded her legs to one side; no sense in standing the whole time. The other occupant follow suit and stretched his legs out on the litter of parchment. The pair sat across from each other, just as they had done when they were children. He intently kept his dark eyes on Lily, but darted them away when she looked back.

She studied him in the incandescent light. It'd been a good year since she'd last seen him, but he was unnervingly familiar, willowy and too thin in robes that hung loosely. Lily doubted he'd ever worn anything that truly fit. He always looked so neglected and melancholy that she couldn't help but want to try and cheer him up. But he was one of them, the Death Eaters, she reminded herself. He was no good. There were few people who stirred as many conflicting feelings in her as Severus Snape did.

"What brings you to the Ministry?" he asked, still sneaking glances at her.

Lily put her bag down beside her and settled into the wait. She brushed her fingertips across the fallen memos and said, "Just retrieving some papers."

"What for?" he pried. The red-haired witch shot him a tense look and debated whether she should tell him. She finally decided that she would; it was something to be proud of after all. Stretching her neck, she unbalanced her gently sloping shoulders. Severus could not keep his gaze from the perfection of her composition. One long lock of hair fell from her temple, curving elegantly at her collar.

"I'm getting married," she announced happily.

"Oh," Severus muttered, promptly looking crestfallen. His black eyes traveled to her left hand and stopped at the overly large ring resting on her finger. Lily followed his line of sight and lifted her hand in response.

Looking at the large princess-cut diamond and its surrounding rubies, she smile faintly. "A bit overly dramatic, isn't it?" she said fondly.

The thin boy stared at the ring, looking forlorn and lost in thought. It was clear that she loved it, even with its vulgarly excessive decadence; it was something he would never have been able to afford. Carefully suppressing his inner storm, he pressed his thin lips together and swallowed hard. Only a thin line forming between his eyebrows

betrayed his feelings.

"Congratulations."

Lily smiled again, an infinitely beautiful sight to him, and replied, "Thank you. So what brings you here?"

He raised his downcast eyes and said softly, "Mum died yesterday."

"Oh Severus, I'm so sorry," she forced out, delighted expression falling and creamy complexion marred by pale patches as blood drained. Feeling rotten that she'd just boasted about her own good fortunes, Lily grimaced.

"It's fine, I've known for a while she'd go," he muttered, looking away.

Lily's warm eyes were sad and guilty as she folded her hands on her lap. "I'm sorry. Was she ill?" she asked tentatively. "If...you don't mind telling. I know it must be hard."

Leaning his head against the sheet metal, Severus answered through barely parted lips with breathy hoarseness. "She had consumption."

"Consumption? But that's a Muggle disease."

He gave a resentful scowl, not at all like someone who had just lost a mother. "Don't be sad, Lily. She was practically a Muggle."

The witch clenched her hand in response to his tone but kept her temper down out of respect.

"There is nothing wrong with Muggles."

Severus cocked his head to look at her strangely. "But she was a witch and should have died like one."

"You have my sincerest condolences," she affirmed coldly before turning up to check on the ceiling hatch in case someone were to come for them. In truth, she just wanted to avoid his imploring glances. Lily sighed and looked apologetic a moment later. This was not the way to behave toward someone who was grieving.

"How is your father?"

The boy snorted, displeasure flashing across his angular face. "Gone. The bastard left as soon as she took her last breath. I haven't seen him since," he spat out bitterly.

"That's worrying," Lily supplied. She swung her legs to her other side as to not allow her feet to fall asleep. Parchment rustled loudly, disrupting the quiet.

"I can't say I miss him. It's probably best that he go drink himself to death." Nonchalant, Severus shrugged and pushed some greasy hair out of his face.

"You shouldn't say that about your own father. People grieve differently."

He shot her a weary look and retorted, "I'm sure he's lamenting the fact that he's got no one to yell at now. I hope he never comes back."

"Severus," she said in a reprimanding tone, clearly appalled by his biting words. "I'm sure he loved her."

"Love?" he sneered. "That's the worst part, you know. I think he actually did love her, but that didn't stop him...love is pretty worthless. Love doesn't give you wealth, love doesn't protect you from harm, love can't give you power."

Lily shrank against the wall, disgusted with him. "I see what is most important to you still. Wealth, protection, power? What worth will they be when you die alone?"

Turning red, Severus felt ashamed at himself. He'd done it again. Just when he'd meant to forge a friendship from this chance meeting, he'd driven her further away.

"You've really not changed at all."

"Lily," he interjected. "I never meant...I'm not the heartless person you think I am."

"Of course you aren't."

He searched for face for the forgiveness he wanted so badly but only found judgement. Sitting upright, he pressed forward. "I'm sorry."

"For what?"

"For," he paused, "everything."

"It was all a long time ago."

"Then why can't we be friends again?"

"I don't think that would be a good idea, Severus. You and I, we're just too different. The things you find valuable, I find deplorable."

"What can I do?" he inquired desperately.

"I don't know," Lily conceded. She seemed lost in thought for a moment. "What you must do...I think it would destroy you."

Severus's face colored with a hopeless despondency, fierce eyes fixed on Lily.

"Please," he pleaded, as if he were begging the ferryman of river Acheron to keep him from Hell. In her presence, he felt compelled to brave any peril, to redefine impossible, just to have a bit of forgiveness.

Every day, he thought of her. And now that she was standing before him, he would give anything to keep her. The lift was an isolating box which brought out deepest desire and elaborate fantasy. There was no James Potter here, no Voldemort, no death, no rules.

The wizard felt a surge of courage and moved forward. He got to his knees and reached to place a hand on Lily's. The loose parchment fluttered weakly when their fingers touched. Lily drew a sudden breath, startled by his audacity. She immediately jerked her hand back, away from his.

"Don't," she warned.

He froze, crushed by her stern rejection.

"Don't sell your soul, Severus. No mortal is worth it."

'But you are no mortal!' he wanted to shout.

The car suddenly gave a little shake, rattling more than moving, and resumed shooting through the Ministry levels. Before they knew it, the door opened with a woman's

clear voice announcing, "Level One."

Lily was the first to get to her feet, smoothing her robes furiously. Severus followed shortly, knees cracking as he straightened them. The scattered memos followed, swarming the air above their heads before flying out into the marble hallway. They stepped out of the lift together.

Lily turned right, toward the contract office, while Severus turned left, toward the records office.

They both stopped in mid-stride upon seeing the other departing in the opposite direction. Hesitantly, Severus turned to face her once more, nervous fingers knotted in thin black robes. "I..." he started, wanting to speak but not finding the words to finally express his heart.

Despite wanting to dash away, Lily did not want to leave on such a sour note. Flipping long red hair over her shoulder, she gave him a tender smile that turned her almond eyes into green crescents. She placed a hand on his shoulder and squeezed it lightly. The gesture made Severus stiffen, unconsciously holding in his breath.

"Let it be. You can't change your way for anyone but yourself, least of all me."

"No, I..."

"I have to go. I'm late."

"But I..."

"Goodbye, Severus," she said softly in parting.

He drank in the sight of her: her fluid grace, her warmth, her beauty. Not wanting to let her go just yet, he moved to grasp her pale hand. Just as his arm shifted upward, however, Lily withdrew hers and took a step back. She gave him a small wistful wave, then slowly retreated a few steps more before going on her way.

Severus felt the overwhelming sense of dread that he would not see her again. Back in the lift, he'd stared into the void and seen nothing.

He should have known then that terrible things were ahead.

"But I love you," he whispered. Had she not said that it made all the difference?

It was too far away and too quiet for her to have heard.

Notes:

1. Title from the Stars song, an anthem of unrequited love
2. "Mum died yesterday" is a reference to Camus's *The Stranger*
3. Inspirations from too many episodes of *Skins*