

Beyond

by Lady Whitehart

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Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: For those of you who haven't read *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, I want to give you fair warning that this contains a huge spoiler. For those of you who have read the book, read on. I hope you find comfort by the end.

"Take... it... Take... it..." The pain was unbearable as his life drained away with his memories. Severus prayed the Harry would look at them; the memories would explain everything. Cold gripped him, and he could sense that the end was near. He grabbed hold of the boy's robes. "Look... at... me..."

Harry hesitated, but for once in his life, the boy did as he was told. It was so unfair to see the eyes of someone he had so desperately and hopelessly loved on the face of someone whom he had equally hated and resented. He looked into those beautiful green eyes... Lily's eyes.

The darkness overcame him, and there was no pain... no cold... just a deep empty feeling over the futile life he had led. He had failed her. After all of these years, he had failed her. He wanted nothing more than to forget. He sat up, although he wasn't sure how he managed it. Severus turned to see his own black-robed body, lying still and white in a pool of his own blood. Gazing down at his face, he noticed that his eyes were still wide open. Potter hadn't even had the decency to close them before the idiot boy had rushed off to his own death. No matter now, he could do nothing to stop what was about to happen. He now knew that he had never had the power to stop it, merely to delay it.

He hovered, wondering if they would even bother to come back for his body. Perhaps they would just let it rot on the floor of the Shrieking Shack, where he should have died so many years ago. Even if someone did, he was so reviled by the wizarding world that his corpse would probably be desecrated.

Seventeen years of doing Dumbledore's bidding... Seventeen years of protecting the child of the woman he loved... Seventeen years of watching the child of his enemy, a child who should have been his... And all of it wasted.

He lowered his head into his insubstantial hands, weeping bitter tears. He was truly nothing now; the nothing he had been his entire life.

"Severus?"

He raised his head to see who had decided to remember his existence.

Before him stood a figure of brilliant light. "It's time to go."

"What?" He didn't want to move from this spot.

"Severus, you're dead. It's time to move on," replied the figure. When Severus didn't move, the figure added, "Or would you prefer to become a ghost?"

A ghost? The thought intrigued him. By becoming a ghost, he could spend the rest of time making others feel a sliver of the pain he had suffered all of his life. He could inflict a bit of his own personal horror on every living soul. He almost looked forward to seeing the expression on Vol-- the Dark Lord's face as he haunted him until the end of his days, slowly driving him further into madness until—

The voice spoke to him again. "Those who fear Death—"

"I'm NOT a coward!" he bellowed, pent-up rage erupting from him. After all he had been through, after he had seen and done how, dare anyone call him such a thing? "I have lived a life of hardship: unloved, misunderstood, discarded. I have loved her for most of my life, yet she chose another man. And ultimately I lost her because she loved her child more than her own life."

He broke down and sobbed as he had that horrible Halloween night when Lily had died. His voice was raw with pain. "I could have made her forget in time. I could have taught her to love me. She did love me once, you know, when we were children. I knew what she was; I accepted her. We were friends; we could have been so... much... more..."

He dropped to his knees, shaking and crying out with the agony of a loss that plagued him even now.

"Severus," the voice had waited until his cries had begun to subside, "it's over now. If you want to go on, we need to do so. You cannot remain here."

"Go where?" he asked in a bitter tone. "To Hell to burn for all eternity? My entire life has been hell. Believe me when I say I won't notice the difference."

Severus's long, thin hands clenched into fists. "I did everything within my power to keep her safe, but I failed in the end. For the past seven years, I've done all I could to keep her son safe, and all the little bastard did was hate me. I kept him alive even though I resented that he lived and she was gone. What thanks did I get for my efforts? None. Not that it matters; he'll die tonight anyway. Enemies of the Dark Lord will call him a hero, a martyr. But what about me?" he demanded, indicating the gray-faced figure on the floor. "They probably won't even bother to look for my body."

"I followed every order that manipulative old bastard gave me. No matter what the cost. I even took his life, cleanly, just as he wanted. But look at how I died! Pointlessly. Painfully. Cast aside when I had outlived my usefulness. No one will know what I've done to further their salvation, and they wouldn't give a damn even if they did."

As his fury waned, remorse flooded him, pouring forth in a new freshet of tears. "All I wanted to do was look in her eyes one last time. I wanted to tell her how much I loved her. How I've remained faithful to her memory all this time. To tell her I tried to protect her son, even though my efforts were wasted in the end. I wanted to see forgiveness in her eyes because..." He fought to master his emotions and failed. "Because it was my fault she was endangered in the first place."

"Severus, you righted the wrong you began." The voice was a soothing balm on deep wounds. "Tonight, Tom Riddle will be defeated. The wand won't do his bidding. You didn't win the wand from Dumbledore; Draco Malfoy had disarmed him before you arrived. Riddle cannot prevail; your death was not a waste."

"But what good will it do me?" He clung to his bitterness. "No one will ever know what I did. The boy will probably ignore my memories. And even if he does see them, he will resent me for loving her... for killing her in the end."

"But *she* knows, Severus. *Lily* knows what you've done in her memory. She has been watching you all this time. Would you like to see her?"

The thought of seeing Lily was at once both thrilling and terrifying. He nodded. The figure smiled. "Then come with me."

He gave one final glance at the battered, broken shell of his earthly self. He rose along with his guide, the pain of his old life falling away. When at last they came to halt, his guide spoke again. "They are all here to thank you, Severus, but she wanted to be the first. Go and be at peace."

Severus could see the familiar form of Lily, rushing to greet him. He was enveloped in warmth and comfort — something he had rarely known during his life. But that was over now. At last, he was home; at last, he was free.

A/N: The ending was not meant to be a romantic one, but if you choose to make it one, feel free to do so.

Contrary to Ms. Rowling's opinion, I view Severus Snape as a true hero. I love Harry and was touched by his courage in the end, but to die and be 'reborn' was his destiny. Snape was defined by his choices. At any point, he could have walked away and told Dumbledore to shove his plan up one of his sun-shiny orifices, and the plan would have crumbled. I hate that he was killed off — if his is dead — and I was hoping for a bit more closure, so I created my own.