## The Last Homecoming

by Snapekat

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Going home stopped feeling good years ago. Maybe it was when Petunia started regarding her no less warmly than an annual infestation of locusts or when her parents began to treat her as a curious and strange guest come to call. But Lily had stopped seeking comfort and regeneration from the place she had called home for so many years. Her home was now in the wizarding world, amongst her own kind, her friends, and, of course, James.

But she had promised that before she married at the end of the summer she would spend her last days as a single woman with her family. She had hoped to recapture some of the innocence and joy of her childhood, but the truth was that they had all changed too much. Petunia was now married and had moved on with her life. Her very rigid and gruff Muggle husband dictated that she have no contact with her sister any more. Happily, she seemed to comply; therefore, Lily had not even heard from her sister, much less seen her since arriving home. The subject of Petunia attending the wedding hadn't been broached by any of them; it was understood she wouldn't be there.

Lily tried to connect with her parents. They assured her that their opinion of James was a high one and they had great hopes for their happiness. But any further discussion about her life, her studies, and her career were met with confused looks perched over forced, simpering smiles. Try as they might, they just couldn't understand the world she came from. And ailing health for them both exacerbated their limited capacity to comprehend a life outside of simple daily survival.

It would only be a few more days, she told herself as she drank a cup of tea and stared out the window at the drizzling rain. She wondered what James was doing and if there had been more gatherings of the Order of the Phoenix. She wondered if her roommate had remembered to feed the cat and if work was piling up for her. She felt useless and in the way in the small cottage, no longer familiar with her parents' routine and customs.

"Did you hear that Eileen Snape finally passed, poor thing." Her mother's nonchalant voice broke into her thoughts.

"What?"

"The Snapes," she rambled on, reheating her tea and busying herself about the small kitchen. "Weren't you friends with the boy? He went to Hogwarts. I thought you were close. She died last week. Though, she was on death's door for years now. That no-good husband of hers saw to that. Good riddance to bad rubbish as far as he's concerned. But I think their son is home settling the estate. Don't know what he's been up to, but I think he's done well. Haven't you kept in touch?"

The topic stunned Lily, and at first she found no voice to answer, her mind too busy processing the names and images from the past. Vividly, she saw a young, dirty, bruised boy telling her fascinating stories about magic and a faraway school that they would soon go away to together. Equally clear was an awkward, thin teenager who held her hand secretly and pouted every time she outscored him in Potions. But the most vibrant image was an angry, mortified young man glaring at her and spitting the word "Mudblood" in front of half the school. His later apology had not taken away the knowledge that he would always consider her impure.

- "I wanted to send a plant or maybe a nice dish over, but I never heard about a funeral or services." Again, Lily's mother's casual tone startled her.
- "I haven't talked to Severus in a long time," Lily finally said. Her voice sounded strangely tight and high to her.

Then her mother was on to a new topic and task, chatting away cheerily as she watered plants, in hopes of disguising the fact that she really didn't know what to talk to her own daughter about.

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The rain had stopped but the day was still gloomy. There was a strange chill in the air for mid-summer. It reminded Lily of the recent trouble she had heard about Dementors and their congregating and breeding affecting the weather.

Laying a light jacket over her shoulders, she left the house and started down the street. It wasn't long before the houses began to look startlingly drab and gray if not downright derelict. At the end of a shabby street, a tall, narrow house loomed. She had never been in it but had known it well. Now, as ever, it was impossible to tell if it was inhabited or abandoned.

The porch creaked and groaned, announcing her arrival, but her knock went unanswered for some time. Just as she was about to pronounce her plan foolish and run back home, the door opened a crack and a familiar black eye peered out at her.

For a moment the eye regarded her in silence and she it.

"Hello, Severus," she said with a mustered smile.

The door opened enough for her to see a full-grown man now occupied the familiar form of her childhood friend. Still thin and gaunt with long, unkempt black hair, there was a mature resignation and stoic severity to his demeanor as he stood staring at this intruder on his porch.

"Lily," spoken in a quiet, clipped voice was all the greeting she got in return.

"I just... I heard about your mother. I'm sorry. I'm home for a few weeks. I thought I'd come by and see if you need... wanted help." The words tumbled awkwardly out of her mouth, and she forced herself to stop speaking in fear that she would say something that would earn her a door in the face.

He still said nothing while surveying her appearance into his life with suspicious caution.

"Can I come in?"

She had asked that question many times in their youth. Always he said no and made an excuse. Eventually she stopped asking. Later she realized that he was ashamed; probably more ashamed of the people within the walls than of the poor, drab house itself. It was a theory that was confirmed when he stepped away from the door to allow her passage into the Snape home, of which he was now the sole occupant and owner.

As soon as she crossed the threshold, the door snapped closed behind her, and she was plunged into near darkness. There was a heavy stench of damp mildew and dust and a slight hint of spoiled food. When her eyes adjusted, she saw she was in a small living room.

Severus moved around her and settled himself into a chair that was surrounded by open boxes. In the center of a floor was a large pile of papers, clothes, and various items that appeared to be destined for the trash heap.

"I've just been doing some cleaning," he said as he surveyed a paper in front of his nose before letting it fall into the refuse pile. "This place has never been cleaned out."

Now it was Lily who didn't know what to say. She stood looking about the room and was overcome by an oppressive misery and sadness. Everything was worn, stained, and covered in dust. Heavy, dark drapes covered the windows, and the only light came from a dim lamp that cast a pathetic glow about the room. It was hard to imagine a young boy thriving and growing in such a household.

"Was she ill long?" Lily asked, trying to find some logical reason for the state of the house.

"Forever," he muttered, his face buried in a box in his lap.

Lily then looked at the pile of trash on the floor. There was everything from clothes to books to photos, even a few broken toys and drawings. Spying a child's rendering of a person riding a broom, she pulled it out of the heap and looked at it. It seemed quite old, and she was certain it was Severus's creation from his youth. But before she could comment, it was snatched from her hand and shoved back under the pile.

An uncomfortable silence settled between them as he continued with his task, ignoring her presence. She shifted about uncomfortably in the room, feeling like a trespasser.

"So, I hear congratulations are in order," he finally said in a wry tone as he tossed more papers into the expanding heap on the floor.

"Are they?" Lily asked with an equally sardonic twitch of her eyebrow.

"I don't know." He gave her a derisive glance. "It's your life, Lily. You tell me."

"That's right. It IS my life. I'm just surprised to hear you offer congratulations."

"Would you rather hear what I really think?"

"I already know what you really think."

"I doubt you do."

"Well, then, why don't you enlighten me," she said in challenge as she made her way to a dusty footstool amongst the clutter and sat down.

Snape met her confrontational stare with a dark look through lank strands of black hair.

"You don't speak to me for almost three years and then suddenly show up at my doorstep handing out some weak offer of sympathy and I'm supposed to be grateful?" The bitterness dripped from every word.

Lily returned his stare and accusation with matched silent resolve. She felt shame and embarrassment and an urge to just get up and leave. But she refused to let him bully her.

"So, how are things with Lord Voldemort?" she tossed back with icy poise. "Lots of chances for advancement, are there? Have you moved up to head Death Eater yet? In charge of torture and dismemberment, maybe?"

Severus gave her a lethal look, then kicked his way free of the trash pile and escaped his chair to begin an enraged pace about the floor.

"Lily, if you just came here to accuse--" he began in a roar.

"No, I didn't!" she shouted, as she too stood from her chair. "I didn't come here for that. I came here because I haven't talked to you in three years. And I thought it was time I did."

"It's long past that time now." Bitterness still prevailed in his words.

"And what was there to say before?" she asked, crossing her arms. "That I'm sorry I was so unreasonably offended at being called a Mudblood and beg you to forgive me for requesting to be treated with a bit of dignity?"

He spun to face her. "I tried to apologize! Or do you not remember just turning your back on me?"

"Oh, I remember it all right because it broke my heart. You chose the dark arts over me." She hadn't realized that the words were true until she had spoken them. Suddenly she remembered the cold sadness that permeated her heart when she had stepped back through the Gryffindor portrait hole and left him standing alone in the hall, for it was the last she ever really said to him.

Severus seemed to find sick humor with her sentiment because it caused him to sneer and chuckle darkly. "You have no idea what a broken heart feels like."

"How can you be so snide?" she gasped. "How can you assume that you know anything of my feelings? Are you so self-absorbed and miserable that you can't look beyond that great beak of yours to see that other people besides you suffer?"

With one giant sweep of his arm, Severus sent a stack of boxes tumbling to the floor, spilling a further assortment of disjointed items onto the floor. He charged to within an inch of her face and glared with deathly dark eyes and lips quivering with rage.

"It broke me when you turned away," he shouted. "It. BROKE. Me! There was no one I loved more than you. But I had nothing and I was nothing. I was desperate for some way to prove myself worthy of you. If you had only given me time, if only you had believed in me--"

"Believed in you?" she returned, gathering her wits after his passionate charge. "I was the only one who ever did believe in you, and I never needed to see a Dark Mark on your arm. You did all of that for you. For your own greed and pathetic need to be accepted. Don't try to blame me for your mistake!"

Her eyes were starting to sting from tightly restrained tears threatening to break through, and she didn't wish for him to see her still so upset by something she thought was long past. Making her own way free of the clutter and trash, Lily attempted to leave but strong fingers gabbed her arm in a painful grip.

"So you're just going to run out on me again?" He spun her around to face him, his nails digging into her arms. "What did you come here for, Lily. Really, what was it? Absolution?" Severus gave a very slight twitch of his eyebrow as he stared deeply into her eyes from. "Curiosity? Or maybe to make sure you aren't making the wrong choice?"

Lily tried for a sharp comeback but found no air in her lungs for speech. Nothing but a pitiful gurgle escaped her. His eyes held her in place, and she felt herself dragged down into their depths, unable to pull herself free.

"Did you come here looking for something the magnificent James Potter isn't able to give you?" Severus asked with menacing quiet.

She had enough mobility to delivery a resounding slap to his face that she had hoped would break his hold on her. But even in his shock from the blow, he held tight and instead of getting away, Lily found herself suddenly smothered in a heavy, fierce kiss.

At first she fought, pulled, and punched at Severus. No matter which way she moved her head, he was there, suffocating her with his wet, lascivious mouth. Just as she was about to panic and lose all sense of sanity, she forced herself to relax and not fight. If she could lull him into thinking she was complying, she could perhaps break free.

Instead, a strange thing happened. She remembered the few hesitant, timid kisses they had shared as budding teens at school together. There had been a few fumbled gropings and cautious exploration. That was her memory of Severus's affections. But this man before her was unfamiliar and foreign in comparison. His powerful kiss was startling and curiously arousing.

Lily found herself forgetting to fight her way free of his arms and allowed her body to conform to his, her lips became pliant, her tongue returned each stroke he delivered.

It was so unlike anything she had experienced with James. He was always a kind and gentle lover, which she had always appreciated. However, this new technique intrigued her, and she began to wonder exactly where Severus had learned such erotic aggression. A bubble of jealousy began to rise from her stomach as she found herself immediately disliking anyone who had spent time luxuriating with her childhood love and teaching him things that could have been theirs to discover together.

Lily suddenly couldn't keep her hands from him. She clutched at Severus's body and face, pulling him closer and kissing him deeper, claiming him for her own at that moment. They stumbled and teetered over heaps of overturned boxes and piles of trash that fenced them into the small living room. Their breaths came raggedly as Severus buried his mouth against her neck, pulling her shirt free of her skirt and running his hands over her bare back.

They mauled each other like starved animals feasting on an exquisite meal. Lily's head swam from the intense feelings and emotions that coursed through her. Something kept telling her to stop, but it was such a weak and pathetic voice she easily ignored it and went on to tear at the buttons on Severus's shirt.

Suddenly there was a funny feeling in her stomach, a pulling, and her whole body felt compressed against his. Her feet found new flooring under them, and she tumbled forward onto Severus. Under him was a mattress that caught their fall. He had Apparated them to the second floor. She was about to chastise him for his impertinence in assuming she would willing go to his bedroom when he rolled on top of her, pinning her to the bed. The feel of his body on top of her was hard and angular.

Still, no words of protest came from her because his lips made her forget any objection she was prepared to declare. Something in her wanted him. She wanted this taboo, illicit moment with a man she hadn't dared love or even think about in three years. It was an act that would forever damage her relationships if it were ever revealed. Lily was allowing a known Death Eater to make love to her. Who knew how many he had tortured, maimed, or killed? But his touch right then was about nothing but passion and desire. It was gentle and demanding, arousing and frightening. It was something she couldn't even begin to consider how to reject.

Lily pulled at his clothing, revealing his flesh to her touch. He was warm, smooth, and hard. His skin was pale, and she could easily trace the outline of nearly every bone in his body. Severus's own hands worked quickly to remove her clothing and experience every inch of her. His lips and fingers seemed to find places that no one had ever ventured, causing her to moan softly through a firmly bitten bottom lip.

When he pushed himself inside her eager, aching body, he looked deeply into her eyes, and she had no choice but to look back. He whispered silent words that she understood, though she couldn't hear. He loved her, had always loved her, had wanted only her, would have died for her. His intensity was overwhelming. An avalanche of emotions and sensations threatened to smother her. Lily began to cry. Somewhere behind the gasps and cries of desire, tears spilled from her eyes. Her release was a mix of delirious tremors of ecstasy and shaking sobs of sorrow.

Severus came with a great shudder and deep groan. Then he lay still on top of her, his face against her neck, very quietly murmuring her name. When he saw that her face was wet with tears, he kissed them away and held her very close. Her tears led her to an exhausted slumber, and she later woke to find the room dark and Severus lying next to her, his arm draped over her protectively as he slept.

Suddenly it was clear to her what she had done. The reality of her actions fell around her like a ton of bricks. Lily groaned slightly and sat up. It was enough to awaken her bed companion.

He sat up too. "It's all right, you can rest a while," he said softly to her, trying to pull her back down next to him.

"No. No, I have to go," she said in a flustered voice and began to crawl out of bed.

"Why? Where do you have to go?" he asked.

"I have to go home, Sev," Lily replied, looking at his puzzled expression. "I leave in just two days."

He looked more confused than ever.

"I'm getting married next week," she reminded him.

Shock replaced confusion, and he sputtered for words as he gripped her arm to keep her from moving.

"Married? You would still marry James Potter after... after this?" He sounded disgusted and insulted.

Lily cringed. He didn't understand. Just as he had done as a boy, he had assumed that what he wanted was what she wanted also. He had never stopped feeling entitled to her.

"Sev," she began gently, "I do love you, I always will. But this doesn't change anything. It was amazing and wonderful. But it was a mistake. "

"Mistake? How can you say that?" he raged back at her. "You don't love him. How can you marry him?"

Lily sighed heavily and took Severus's hand from her arm and held it. "We're alike, James and I. We want the same things. We believe the same things. He understands me."

Saying it out loud finally cemented it in her heart also. All the doubts that had shadowed the corners of her mind since the engagement was announced vanished.

"I mean it when I say I'll always love you. I will. How can I not love that little, skinny boy who first told me about magic?" She smiled dreamily as she stroked a lock of black hair out of his angry eyes. "But I wouldn't have made you happy because you would never have been happy with yourself. I could never follow you on your path, and you would have never followed mine."

He seemed stunned into silence. Lily took that moment to get up and start finding her clothes. She dressed and still he said nothing.

"Lily," his voice was cold and tinged with what she recognized as pain. "I'll give you one more chance not to walk out that door. Don't become my enemy."

He sat barely draped in a sheet, his pale skin glowing in the semi-darkness. His stare radiated sorrow and fury, causing her heart to cinch tightly in her chest.

She walked back to the bed and knelt upon it. His features seemed to relax as she took his face in her hands and kissed him deeply.

"I love you, Sev," she whispered. "It won't matter what side we fight from, I always will."

Lily bolted from the room before he could stop her. She ran down the dark, narrow stairs and out of the house. Outside in the chilly rain, she could hear her name screamed once, then again. The sound of her running feet sloshing through puddles drowned out any more sounds. The cold drops mingled with the tears she cried all the way home.

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The day was crisp and bright. Sun splashed down in beautiful, chaotic patterns through the trees. The outside garden was peppered with a small group of people. A man in flowing robes spoke a few words. The couple kissed and people cheered. She looked radiant. Or maybe it was just the sun dancing off of her brilliant, copper hair.

He watched until he thought his heart would explode in his chest He watched her kiss and hug people who weren't worthy of her affections. He witnessed an event that he thought would never happen. He saw celebration alongside his own symbolic death. He could take no more.

Severus turned from the horrific sight and receded further into the trees where he Apparated back to the Dark Lord's lair, leaving his heart behind forever.