Always

by Lady Whitehart

She was with him until the very end--if only in his mind.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: This was my contribution to Romancing the Wizard's first Post-DH challenge. Challenge Fifteen: Deathly Hallows Missing Scenes gave members the chance the write romantic scenes that weren't in DH but would have been nice to see.

WARNING: The following should not be read without a box of tissues handy.

Always

Severus sat on a battered chair on the first floor of the Shrieking Shack. His head was buried in his hands. Soon his failure would be complete. Soon Lily's son would be dead. He slipped his hand into the pocket of his robes, pulling out the half of a wizarding photograph his, a scrap of a letter with her signature, and his memories were all he had left of her. His long finger lovingly traced her hair as he stared at the laughing face of Lily Evans e would *never* think of her as Lily Potter. How many times had they shared laughter? What kind of a life could they have had if he had changed when she had wanted him to do so?

"I love you, Lily. Everything I've done has been for you," he whispered to the image. But I don't know how to finish what I've started.

I know you will find a way, Severus. Lily continued to smile at him, but he wasn't heartened much.

Since he had been summoned from the battlefield, he had been filled with a feeling of foreboding; nothing good could possibly come from this sudden meeting with the Dark Lord. He needed to find Potter to deliver the last bit of information the brat needed to complete his task. Now he was stranded here instead of seeking out the boy, and he could feel that time was running out.

I'm sorry, Lily, he thought, staring down at the face he had loved since he was a skinny boy of nine.

There was no accusation in those beautiful eyes, just love, happiness, and encouragement Don't give up, Severus.

He was with McGonagall. I know he was Severus thought forcefully. Staggering to his feet, he began to pace. He wanted her to know that had tried. The other teachers attacked me. There were too many of them, and I couldn't get to him. I was hoping to find him on the grounds, but he wasn't there.

Please, don't stop trying. It sounded like Lily was about to cry. He hated the very thought of her crying. She should be at peace now, not worrying or crying over things of this world. He had taken over the worrying and the pain because he loved her, and it was partly his fault that she had died.

I will, but it won't make a difference.

A sensation like a hand stroking his check caused him to shiver. Severus, that message makes all the difference. Harry must know those things or all is lost.

Don't you see? He's going to die whether I give him the message from Dumbledore or not. I cannot change that.

"Severus?" Lucius Malfoy's hoarse voice interrupted Severus's thoughts. "The Dark Lord wishes to speak with you."

He slipped the picture into the pocket of his robe before turning to Malfoy. Clearing his mind of his last thoughts, he held his head high and headed to face the Dark Lord. Hopefully he would not be kept long, and he could resume his search for Potter. He had to find Lily's son before it was too late.

He was consumed by a sudden desire to run. It was a cowardly impulse, and he had proven to Lily and to himself that he was not a coward. Memories of her and his love for her always made him strong. He needed to know that she was with him. Before he entered the room where the Dark Lord was waiting, he dared one last thought of her. Lily, will you be with me?

I'm always with you when you need me. Lily's voice was firm and warm. But, Severus, please be careful.

He stepped into the room. Nagini was floating beside her master in a protective bubble. His only hope was to get away as quickly as possible, for time had indeed run out.

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As the snake struck, he could hear Lily's scream mingled with his own. He fell to the floor, futilely trying to staunch the flow of blood.

Lily, help me! he pleaded silently. As he felt the venom steal through his veins, he knew there wasn't any hope for his life to be saved; all he wanted was comfort in his last moments. Misery rose in his throat, mingling with blood, choking him. I don't want to die alone.

I'm here, Severus. I'm right here, whispered Lily's voice.

He could feel someone next to him. Through a haze of pain and confusion, he saw a young man with messy, black hair and glassesLily, he pleaded. Don't let James hurt me. Not now.

Severus, it's Harry. Give him the memories.

He couldn't... He wouldn't give up his memories. No, he protested as he fought for another breath, they're mine; they're all I have left.

Please, Severus, for my sake. Lily's voice was pleading with him.

How could he deny her anything thing now? If it meant that he hadn't failed her, he could part with some of those memories. He addressed the disheveled person beside him. "Take... it.... Take... it...."

One by one, the memories drained from his mind as the blood drained from his body. He was watching Lily from the bushes on the playground.... He was telling her about the Dementors as they sat by the river.... They were on the train to Hogwarts.... Lily was angry at him for his friendship within his house.... He called her a Mudblood by the lake after James and Sirius ganged up on him.... She refused to forgive him.... He was begging Dumbledore to protect her and her family.... She was dead.... The memories flowed at a dizzying pace until he reached the one that was most crucial to her son: that Harry had been raised to die.

He was so cold now. So cold and alone and frightened. Lily?

You're going to be with me very soon, Severus. I promise.

But not even her comforting words could hold off the cold that was overpowering him. He had so much to atone for. What if he wasn't deemed good enough to go where she was now? In case I'm not, I want to see you one last time.

Look at Harry, Lily's voice urged. See me in him.

Severus grabbed the front of the boy's robes and pulled him closer. "Look... at... me...."

His black eyes struggled to focus on the green ones. There she was. Those lovely, bright green eyes looked at him, not with contempt but with a sadness, pity.

I love you so much, Lily.

When she answered him, her voice was like a delicate caress. And I love you, Severus.

Always? He had to know; he couldn't die without hearing that she loved him too.

Yes, Severus, always.

Reassured, he released his fragile hold on this life and hoped that the next would finally bring him to Lily, would bring him peace.