

Destiny's Secret

by Fervesco

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Chapter One

Chapter 1 of 18

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Disclaimer: They're all mine! Rowling says she's done with them and I'm calling dibs! What's that? Her copyright still stands? Well, that's a little selfish! She kills off half the cast, announces she's finished and then claims she still owns them? Have they no escape? Okay, I'll just borrow them, give them a little fun, then send them back hosed down and smelling sweet. ;-)

CHAPTER ONE

Lily stretched her legs out, her warm skin grateful for the coolness of the leaves under her, even if they were a bit scratchy. It was early autumn, but the weather was still scorching. She leant her head back until her long red hair touched the leaf-strewn ground. The blue sky was just visible through the tiny gaps in the over-hanging trees where they had taken shelter from the searing heat of the playground. Vaguely she was aware of her toes tingling, the dried leaves stuck beneath her palms; she'd been sitting here far too long. But she wasn't done yet. There were so many questions she needed answers to, so many things she didn't know. And Lily Evans liked to know everything.

She glanced over at him, bathed in dappled light cast through the overhead leaves. For once, she thought, Severus didn't look so out of place, so awkward. Leaning back against the tree trunk he looked so sure of himself and why shouldn't he? He was here, commanding knowledge of things she could only dare to dream of. Tales of a faraway school led by great wizards and witches, where she could learn to do almost anything with the wave of a wand. Where fairy book creatures were a reality and monsters came in all shapes and forms. They were tales no eleven-year-old could resist.

His eyes shifted to her face and Lily felt herself blush as he caught her staring at him. He raised his dark eyebrows at her inquisitively.

She fiddled with the ends of her hair, twirling it nervously in her fingers. "Severus?" she asked, finally finding the courage to question him further, glancing up at him through her lashes to judge his reaction.

He smiled warmly at her. "Yeah?"

She drew in a deep breath, and said wistfully, "Tell me about the Dementors again."

His eyes didn't leave her face, but they did widen in surprise at her question. "What d'you want to know about them for?"

Her heart was pounding, not sure if she really wanted the answer. The idea of Dementors, beings that would suck the very soul out of her, both terrified and fascinated her, they were like the ghouls from a fairy tale, something no child really wanted to hear, but all the same, essential to the thrill of the story. "If I use magic outside school" she began, hearing her voice quiver as she spoke, her concern betraying her.

"They wouldn't give you to the Dementors for that!" Severus replied, a little laugh in his voice. He changed his attitude quickly as he saw her face fall at his amusement. He rushed to explain himself. "Dementors are for people who do really bad stuff. They guard the wizard prison, Azkaban. You're not going to end up in Azkaban, you're too " Severus' pale face blazed red, and he picked up more fallen leaves, shredding them in his long, stringy fingers.

Lily watched him, intrigued. *I'm too what?* she thought. Just as she began to find the nerve to ask him what he'd been about to say, a small rustling noise caught her attention. It hadn't escaped eleven-year-old Severus' hearing either. The boy didn't seem to miss a thing, ever.

"Tuney!" Lily exclaimed, spotting her sister hiding none too successfully behind one of the trees. Lily was happily surprised to find her dear sister had come to join them; ever since Severus had become her friend, Petunia had spent less and less time with her and more and more time holed up in her room.

Severus jumped to his feet though, the leaves he'd been holding falling to the ground. His entire demeanour changed. With eyes narrowed, teeth clenched and pulling himself up to his full height, he was almost frightening. "Who's spying now?" When she didn't answer, he demanded, "What d'you want?" The disgust in his was tone blatant.

Lily felt a lump form in her throat this was not going anywhere good, it never did when Severus and Petunia were together.

Petunia glanced at her sister. Lily could see it in her eyes, Petunia's struggle to find something hurtful to say to Severus. She didn't understand why her sister hated him so much, why she couldn't be friends with him as well. Lily found him and everything he had to say about the wizarding world fascinating, and she was sure, if her sister would just listen, she'd be enthralled too.

"What is that you're wearing, anyway?" Petunia finally spat, pointing at Severus' tired smock. "Your mum's blouse?"

Severus' jaw formed a firm line as Lily heard him gritting his teeth.

She went to say something, anything, to calm the situation, but what was there to say? There was no denying his clothes were shabby, anything said to pretend they weren't would be hollow and pointless. But what did clothes matter?

The light autumn air felt increasingly heavy around Lily, thick and hard to breathe. Just as she was about to suggest Petunia come and join them, that they stop all this nonsense, there was a crack. A branch over Petunia's head fell through the air, tumbling so fast Lily only had time to scream. The branch caught Petunia on the shoulder and she let out a sharp cry of surprise. Staggering backwards she finally caught her balance, barely stopping herself from falling over. Lily saw it on her face, the surprise, then the shock; her bottom lip wavered before Petunia burst into tears.

"Tuney!" Lily cried, going to help her sister, but Petunia turned and ran, not even glancing back at Lily's call.

Angrily, Lily rounded on Severus and glared accusingly at him. "Did you make that happen?"

"No."

But Lily saw the telltale minute twitch of his mouth.

"You did!" She was backing away from him in horror. How dare he hurt her sister? "You did! You hurt her!"

"No no I didn't!" Severus protested, but Lily wasn't having it. She gave him a scathing look and ran from the little thicket, off after her older sister.

Lily arrived back at their house just in time to hear Petunia telling her mother all about it. "And then...and then he made this massive branch break off this tree and slammed it right down on me!" She was wailing, the tears streaking down her face not really warranted for the small injury she'd received.

"Honestly, Petunia, no friend of your sister's would do that to you!" their mother was saying, sounding more than a little exasperated. "Look, between this nonsense and Rose blasting that great hole in the laundry door, I've just about had it with all this magic business!"

Petunia smiled through her tears in a triumphant manner. "Maybe they shouldn't go to Hogwarts, Mum. You know, they'll only learn more"

But her words were cut off by an even more demanding voice.

"That was not my fault!" Lily looked up to find her twin sister standing in the doorway to the living room looking furious. "She," Rose spat, glaring at Lily and pointing one accusing finger at her chest, "stole my stockings!"

"I did not!" Lily yelled back defensively. She was so tired of this, of her own sister, her twin sister for goodness sake, trying to blame all of her bad behaviour on her. "I wish you'd stop lying! You stole my stockings after you put great holes in your own, then you wore them outside with no shoes on and now they've got ladders all up them!" She glared at Rose. "I'm sick of you taking my things!"

"And I'm sick of you being such a goody two shoes!" Rose bit back.

"Now, now, girls!" their mother yelled over their shouting as Lily tried to defend herself again. "Both of you, find something else to do! Something that doesn't involve destroying the house." She glared at the pair of them "And no more magic!" She turned to her eldest daughter and Lily could see the pity on her face. Her mother had sat down and talked to her just yesterday about how left out Petunia was feeling since Rose and she had discovered their new abilities. Guilt washed over Lily; she'd done absolutely nothing to include Petunia again today, she'd just rushed off to meet Severus again without a thought for her sister. "Petunia," her mother said gently, "come show me your shoulder, dear. We'll see what we can do about it."

"Tell-tale!" Rose hissed under her breath at Lily. Her resentful twin waited until her mother's back was turned, then poked her tongue out.

Lily narrowed her eyes and glared back. It wasn't fair! Why did it have to be Rose that was a witch as well? She'd much rather be going off to this Hogwarts school with Petunia. But, as yet, Petunia hadn't shown any magical ability. But Lily still hoped maybe Petunia was a witch, maybe she'd just have to work harder at it. She'd caught her a week ago standing before the mirror in her room, waving sticks around, trying to do magic. And Petunia hadn't been half mad when she'd caught Lily watching! But it didn't look good. Severus insisted that everyone who was magic received a letter the school year they turned eleven, and Petunia was now twelve and a half. Lily could only wish that one day it would happen, that Petunia would discover how to do it, that there had been a mistake and then they could go off to Hogwarts together. All of them, Severus too.

Lily and Severus sat under the same patch of trees as before, Lily lying in the dry summer grass, staring up at the clouds that peeked through the treetops, a piece of parchment clutched against her chest. She pulled it up, reading it again, a broad smile on her face.

"We're actually going!" she exclaimed again.

Severus laughed, "For the tenth time, yes. But I've been telling you that for ages."

"First of September..." Lily said wistfully. She turned and looked at him. "How are you getting to King's Cross? Maybe Mum and Dad could take you as well..."

"Mum said she wants to take me," Severus said, a little darkly. "I think she wants to make sure she's good and rid of me."

"That's not true!" Lily protested out loud, but inside she did have to wonder. She'd only caught sight of Mrs Snape once, and she didn't exactly strike Lily as the mothering sort.

She looked at Severus and found him openly staring back at her, sitting up rigidly from where he had been slouched back against a tree. He opened his mouth to say something, then stopped.

"What is it?" Lily asked, propping herself up on her elbow.

"I promise me something?" he asked, his voice wavering a little in nervousness.

"What's that?"

"When we get to Hogwarts, we'll still be friends?" His brow knitted as he waited for her answer.

Lily was a little surprised, she hadn't even considered they wouldn't be. "Of course!" she said with a grin.

"Best friends?" he questioned, still looking doubtful.

"Best friends forever," Lily assured him.

Severus smiled back down at her, and relaxed back against the tree trunk, repeating her word gently, "Forever."

A/N: For the Post DH Prompt Challenge:

34. Teenage Severus Snape and Lily find a hidden part of the castle that even the Marauders don't know. What happens, if anything? Then nearly twenty (more or less) years later, Severus, who considered this place to be his own private little nook, finds (fill in the witch/wizard) in the room. Who is it? What did he find her/him doing? And what does Severus do? Or not do?

Legal stuff: Parts of this chapter contain quoted material from Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows - no copy right infringement intended, just having some fun!

Dedicated to painfully long camping trips, terrible epilogues, half of NaNoWriMo and Monteiths Summer Ale. Cheers!

Thank you to my dear beta (who shall remain nameless until voting is over!) for giving me the inspiration (Her: Hey, I know, let's do NaNoWriMo Me: Uh... okay... what's that? Her: 50k words. By the end of November. Oh, and it started yesterday!) And thank you for her memory for facts, too, without such I'd be completely lost. :D

Chapter Two

Chapter 2 of 18

COMPLETE! Hermione knows his secrets, his destiny unfulfilled. Snape sees only desolate dark. But in the tale of love and longing, Lily remembers everything.

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CHAPTER TWO

Petunia had called her a freak.

Lily's long awaited, much anticipated day had finally arrived. But the first of September, and her first trip off to Hogwarts, was definitely not turning out as she'd hoped. She had hugged her parents goodbye, promised to do her best for them, then looked at Petunia hoping for some sort of 'bon voyage', a hug, a wave, anything would have been nice. But her sister had looked at her with such loathing that she felt like her heart was going to stop beating. She'd then simply looked away.

She hadn't looked back.

Almost in tears, Lily entered the train, desperately trying not to cry as she passed all the other students. Finally, she'd holed herself away in an empty carriage, pressed her face against the window, and stared out at the platform. She'd hoped she'd catch a glimpse of her sister, that Petunia would come to her and apologise, but there was nothing. Her father had waved goodbye to her, her mother had blown her a kiss; Petunia had stood there, looking at the ground, refusing to even acknowledge her.

And who knew where Rose was? She'd disappeared the moment they'd stepped through the barrier onto platform nine and three-quarters. Knowing Rose, how cocky and confident she was, she'd probably already found herself a bunch of new friends on the train, without so much as a backward glance to their parents.

She never should have let Petunia know she'd read the letter from Headmaster Dumbledore. It had been a really stupid mistake, but one she couldn't take back now. And now, Petunia hated her. Her dear older sister despised her. Lily felt terrible, she should have made more time for Petunia, refused to go to Hogwarts when Petunia couldn't. Something, anything. But no, she'd just danced around so excited, practically rubbing Petunia's nose in it. She felt one tear spill over and trickle down her cheek.

Lily glanced up when she heard the door to the carriage slide open, only to find Rose standing there looking too pleased with herself.

"Where's Snivellus, Lil?" she asked nastily, a triumphant smirk on her face.

"I told you to stop calling him that! He had a cold!" Lily said, snapping her head back round at her sister.

"Aw, is dear Lily sticking up for her boyfriend?" Rose mocked, making kissing motions with her lips. "Funny, I don't even see him here!"

"That's none of your business, Rose!" Though Lily had been a little surprised not to see him at the station. That would just clinch it for her, to have him not be at Hogwarts either.

"Okay, you sit and mope by yourself, I'm going to find some fun people to hang out with!"

Lily turned her back on her sister. Knowing Rose's idea of fun, that was bound to mean some people she could cause trouble with. And Lily was in no mood to talk to anyone, let alone the sort of people Rose would meet. Even as she heard a crowd of rowdy boys enter her carriage she didn't pull her face away from the window.

Severus had eventually found her as well, stumbled into the swaying compartment to sit beside her. He'd tried to cheer her up, even. And his presence and excitement had worked a little, bringing the smallest of smiles to her face. And maybe, she thought, she could write to Tuney when she got to Hogwarts and her sister would forgive her and everything would be all right. Maybe at Hogwarts she really could talk to Dumbledore and change his mind about excluding Petunia.

The boys, who'd paid no attention at all to her when she had been leaning against the window crying, suddenly had all the time in the world for them when Severus had proclaimed, "You'd better be in Slytherin."

"Slytherin? Who wants to be in Slytherin? I think I'd leave, wouldn't you?" one of the boys asked another nastily.

"My whole family have been in Slytherin," the other one replied with self-disgust.

"Blimey," said the first boy, "and I thought you seemed all right!" He got a grin in return from the other lad.

Lily just sat there, listening to them shooting their jibes at each other, her dislike for the group growing and growing at their arrogance. And Severus was fuming next to her, she could feel the stiff way he was sitting on the seat beside her. Why he couldn't just ignore them, she didn't know.

"Maybe I'll break tradition. Where are you heading, if you've got a choice?"

The first boy made a great show of lifting an invisible sword, and Lily had the overwhelming thought of a little kid playing Arthur pulling Excaliber from the enchanted stone. So ridiculous, so immature, she thought.

"*'Gryffindor, where dwell the brave at heart!'* Like my dad."

Snape made a small, disparaging noise. The boy turned on him.

"Got a problem with that?"

"No," Snape replied, but by the tone of his voice Lily knew he meant nothing of the sort. "If you'd rather be brawny than brainy"

"Where're you hoping to go, seeing as you're neither?" one of them replied, and the group broke into laughter.

Their final insult to Severus had been quite enough!

"Come on, Severus, let's find another compartment!"

She wasn't surprised at the stupid noises the boys made behind her back as she'd left. But as a voice called out "See ya, Snivellus!" as she slammed the compartment door behind them, she stiffened. Rose had been doing her usual work again, spreading her hateful nickname for Severus about the other first years.

Who cares? Lily thought. They're just silly little boys!

Severus, however, didn't seem to feel the same.

She'd eventually found a carriage that was empty, not an easy thing to do. They'd finally had to make do with one that smelt suspiciously funny, something Lily couldn't quite pinpoint, the closest she could think of was sulphur and burning plastic, but it was either that or cram into yet another full carriage, and Lily wasn't in the mood.

By that time, Severus was burning red, his fingers clenching and unclenching.

"I hope they do all end up in Gryffindor!" he'd announced. "It's where they belong!"

"Don't listen to them, Severus. They're just bullies, there's no point..."

But instead he wasn't listening to her. "Stupid, ignorant twits, the lot of them! Slytherin would never have them!"

Lily had left the sorting ceremony feeling thoroughly downhearted. So much for her wonderful first day at Hogwarts. Her sisters hated her, she and Severus had already made a bunch of enemies, and now she'd been split up from him. Even Rose wasn't in her House, though Lily, even if she didn't want to really admit it to herself, was relieved.

She'd followed the rest of Gryffindor up to their tower, and sat awkwardly in the common room as everyone else chattered and cheered.

"I don't believe we've been properly introduced," a young boy with a too cocky smile said, sauntering up to her. Lily took one look at him, and the dark haired boy that

flanked him, and felt her hackles go up.

"What a loss," she'd said angrily, recognising them as two of the jeering boys from the train.

"Oh, come on now. You're in Gryffindor now; you wouldn't want to be in Slytherin. They're all a bunch of losers over there, obsessed with the Dark Arts and pretending they're oh so superior to everyone," the boy had told her.

Lily didn't hear anymore that he said for a while. The Dark Arts? She'd heard word of them from Severus, not much, but enough to make her know this wasn't a good thing. And now Severus and Rose were both in Slytherin. She worried for Severus, and as for Rose, for Rose she worried for everyone else.

"I'm going to bed," she'd said haughtily, getting to her feet.

"Hey, we haven't even told you our names!" the other boy called at her retreating back.

"I'm sure they're not worth knowing," Lily called tersely, and departed for the first years dorm without so much as a glance back in their direction.

Weeks flew by, and Lily began to detest her time at school. James and Sirius, who'd finally forced their names on her, refused to leave her alone in class or in their common room; they'd even followed her to library until Madam Pince had banned them from there, Lily included, for three weeks for disturbing the other students. Nor had Petunia replied to any of her letters, not one, and she'd written to her sister nearly every day, each time apologising more and more.

If it hadn't been for seeing Severus in Potions and outside classes, Lily would have given up and gone home.

She glanced around the empty hallway, searching for any sign of anyone watching her. Just as she went to slip into Dungeon Five, movement at the end of the hall caught her eye. Around the corner snooped Mrs Norris. Lily liked cats, and usually kittens, almost any animal in fact, but Mrs Norris was the exception. She was tiny, even for a kitten, but those eyes they bore right through her. She made the mistake on her second day of reaching out to pat her and she'd nearly lost her hand for her troubles. The scrawny moggy's mere name made her shiver. Mostly because she was synonymous with the castle's decrepit caretaker, but partly because she really was a nasty looking feline. And sure enough, limping, but not far behind, came Argus Filch.

"You!" His cracked and corrosive voice made her flinch. "You, stop right there!"

Lily froze on the spot, terrified. She'd only been at Hogwarts three-and-a-bit months and she already knew all the tales, tall or not, about Hogwarts decrepit caretaker. Everything from him being a Squib to tying pupils up by their thumbs. She didn't know how much of it to believe, but although she was small and only eleven, she wasn't stupid enough to take any chances.

"I have had enough of your nonsense, missy! First, you destroy Greenhouse Two Then you're found breaking into my office and then you have the audacity to run! But it's too late now, you silly girl, I've got you!"

"Wh-what?" Lily stammered, her voice coming out as a mere squeak.

"Don't *what* me, girly. You know exactly what I'm talking about! I'd hang you up by the ankles in my office if I had it my way! Count yourself lucky all I can do is take you to Dumbledore!" he shouted at her, his jowls wobbling as he spoke.

Lucky? Lily thought, quivering. Being sent to the Headmaster's office didn't sound lucky at all.

"Wretched little beast," he wheezed under his breath. "Silly enough to give me your horrid name and all before you took off. Lily Evans. Don't doubt for a minute girly, that I'll be watching you. I know your sort, and I won't be having it! You hear me? I won't!"

She stared at him, her mouth gaping, utterly confused at what he was talking about. But she had a fair idea who was behind it all, the same person who was always behind it.

"Don't stand there gawking, get a move on! You," he said with a scary smile cracking his face, "have an appointment with the Headmaster!"

Lily traipsed along behind Filch all the way to Dumbledore's office, her heart thumping, her heels dragging. The caretaker stopping in his limped walk every so often to make sure she was following him. "Move it, girly!" he'd yell at her occasionally. Everyone in the corridors stopped to stare at her as she walked past, head hanging. She'd never been so humiliated in her life.

"Professor," Filch said, as they stood before Dumbledore's desk. "This is the little miscreant I found breaking into my office!"

"Professor, I never..." Lily protested, but Dumbledore held up his hand to silence her.

He turned to the caretaker. "That will be all, Argus."

"Don't you let her off!" Argus had screeched. "I've had enough of her delinquency! She'll destroy the whole damn school if you're not careful!"

"Thank you, Argus. You may go." Dumbledore sat in silence as the caretaker stared at him, but when Dumbledore said no more and refused to break his gaze, Filch had finally turned and left his office, scowling at Lily on his way past. Lily quickly looked away, frightened by his stringy hair and wheezing. Her fingers twisted nervously in her own hair, twirling the dark red strands around her fingers.

"Now, Miss Evans," Dumbledore said, sitting back and eyeing her carefully. "Lily, I believe."

"Yes," Lily squeaked.

Ever since she'd arrived at Hogwarts it hadn't been Lily anything in fact, her and her sister appeared to be as one as far as everyone here was concerned. Both Miss Evans. It drove her crazy, because Rose was about the last person in the world she wanted to be mistaken for; Rose who had landed herself in Slytherin and was living up to her House's reputation more than anyone could believe for a first year. The Slytherins were so proud. Well, most of them. Severus, at least, seemed to side with Lily. She found herself wondering once more at the injustice of it all, why they couldn't have been placed in the same house; Ravenclaw maybe, that wouldn't be so bad. And they'd fit in there, both smart, both dedicated to their work....

"This wasn't you, was it? Who broke into Mr Filch's office?"

Lily contemplated her answer for a moment. She didn't want to get Rose into trouble, but she didn't want to be expelled either. "No, sir," Lily replied, fidgeting with her fingers.

"Nor was it you who blew up Greenhouse Two?"

"No, sir."

"Or hexed Miss Winter's ear into bats ears? Or stole the Defence Against the Dark Arts lesson plan? Or, I assume, wrote 'Albus Dumbledore is a dodderly pillock' on the third floor girls' bathroom wall?"

She pulled her head up straight and looked at him in horror. "No, sir!" she said with a gasp.

Dumbledore chuckled. "I do prefer being called a fool to a pillock, but there you go."

Lily laughed nervously, not sure if she should find that funny or not.

"I shall talk to your sister then." Dumbledore tapped his fingers on his desk. "Sherbert lemon?" he asked, offering her one from the small bowl on his desk.

"Thank you," she said, unwrapping the sour sweet and popping it in her mouth.

"And how is Petunia?"

Lily's heart fell at mention of her older sister, the sharp sweet in her mouth suddenly turning much more bitter. "I don't know, sir. She won't return my letters."

Dumbledore nodded. "It is hard, I must think, being left out. Especially when both your sisters are off at Hogwarts. Though, Miss Evans, you must remember it is not your fault. This is just the way things happen. And I'm sure, one day, your sister will see that."

"Yes, sir," Lily replied, though she didn't find his words comforting. The last thing Petunia had said to her was to call her a freak as she boarded the Hogwarts Express. That was hardly something to just be washed under the bridge.

"Well, then. You may go. And might I suggest spending the day out in the sun? It's a little chilly, but I suspect it will be the last fine day we'll get for a while. Goodness knows, you're looking a little pale." He looked at her and smiled. "You and Mr Snape both."

Lily blushed. "Yes, sir."

She'd moved to the door, about to leave, but she had to ask him. She had to know. "Sir?"

"Yes, Miss Evans?"

"I was wondering could I be sorted again?"

Dumbledore smiled. "And why might you ask such a thing?"

"I just... I don't think Gryffindor is for me. Maybe Ravenclaw..." she looked up and met his gaze. "Maybe Slytherin?"

Dumbledore gave her a consoling look. "You know, I do think sometimes we sort too soon. But I'm afraid, Lily, the sorting hat's word is final. Not even I can change that."

Lily's hope vanished. "Yes, sir."

"You know, Lily, it wouldn't hurt for the Houses to get along a bit more. There really is no reason that just because your friend is in Slytherin and you are in Gryffindor that you can't continue to be friends. If everyone would just sit back and see, put aside all this nonsense, Gryffindor and Slytherin compliment each other quite nicely."

His words did lift her hopes a little, and she gave him a smile before she left. "Thank you, Professor."

AN: Thank you again to my wonderful beta for wrangling this into shape :-*. I couldn't do without her!

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Chapter Three

Chapter 3 of 18

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CHAPTER THREE

But Lily didn't head outside to the lake with all the other students as Headmaster Dumbledore had suggested, partly because she knew James Potter and his arrogant friends would be there. It was bad enough having to share classes and a common room with them without spending her Saturday in their unpleasant company. She knew Rose would bound to be causing trouble somewhere and she wanted to stay out of that as well. But mostly she didn't want to go outside because she knew Severus would be waiting for her in the dungeons. That was, if he hadn't given up already. She was now over an hour late for their meeting.

She raced back down to the dungeons, not pausing to wait for someone to show up this time. She slipped inside Dungeon Five and looked around. There was no one there. Severus had left already. He probably thought she'd forgotten him. Her heart sank.

She was just about to turn and leave when she heard his voice from the direction of the storeroom. She looked over, and there was his sallow face, large nose and stringy-haired head poking out around the door. She smiled at him.

"Come on!" he'd called urgently to her, glancing around the empty classroom, his eyes drawn to the door.

"What..." she began, but he didn't let her finish.

"You'll see," he cut in urgently.

He disappeared inside the room, and, glancing back over her shoulder at the door, Lily followed him. Her heart thumped they shouldn't be in here, it wasn't right. They were breaking school rules just by entering the classroom, and now into the storeroom. But a thrill ran through her at the idea, feeling a little as she presumed Rose did every time she did something she shouldn't. Then again, she doubted her sister had any such apprehension about the things that she did.

The storeroom was crammed full, shelves upon shelves teetering to the ceiling with bottles of potions, and jars of ingredients. Lily hardly dared to breathe for worry of breaking something and alerting anyone to their whereabouts.

"What are we" she began in a whisper, but Severus cut her off with some seemingly nonsensical words.

"James Potter," he said triumphantly, "is an arrogant toerag."

"Honestly," Lily began, about to tell him to stop wasting his time on James, but her words left her as she saw two great shelves full of dusty jars and florescent phials slide apart, their contents wavering dangerously as they moved. To her surprised, they revealed a small, dark opening into the stone wall, which disappeared into the darkness.

"What's down there?" Lily asked peering a little nervously over his shoulder.

Severus turned to her and grinned. "Freedom."

And he took her hand, pulling her through the opening. The moment they were through, she heard the sliding of the bookcases behind them. Panicked, she spun around, pushing fervently at the back of the wooden shelves to no avail.

"Lumos!" The light from Severus wand illuminated the passageway. "Lily, it's okay," he told her, grasping hold of her hand again. "Come on."

"Where does it go?" she asked, her feet rooted to the spot as she tried to peer down the tunnel before them. The light from his wand only reached so far, and all she could make out was a slight bend in the tunnel, the stone floor and the masonry walls.

"I told you, freedom."

She still wouldn't move.

"Don't you trust me?" Severus asked, looking hurt.

She stalled a moment, before replying. "Of course I trust you. It's the monsters that are hiding down here I don't trust."

He laughed. "There's no monsters, I assure you."

Finally she started walking, slowly following in Severus' enthusiastic steps. The air grew heavier, stale, and the unhealthy stench of mildew cloyed at her nostrils as the tunnel became narrower and narrower, and the castles rugged walls gave way to solid rock. Lily dared a glance back behind her, but she could see nothing but darkness. The tunnel twisted endlessly, gradually inclining, then taking a great turn downwards, down a set of crumbling stone steps.

At the bottom of the steps the stone beneath their feet became wet. Soon great puddles formed on the floors, and as Lily accidentally brushed up against one wall, her arm became drenched. In the dim light she could just make out small rivulets of frigid water streaming down the rock.

"Where are we?" Lily asked again, still a little frightened. They'd walked for what seem like forever into the tunnel. It felt like miles from Hogwarts. It possibly was.

Severus came to a sudden halt, and Lily bumped straight into the back of him. She jumped back in fright, until she realised they'd reached a door. It was small, wooden, nothing much to look at. Severus was fiddling with a key in a lock before him, and with a great flourish, he pushed the door open, holding it for her.

"I told you," he said to her back as she took a tentative step inside. "Freedom."

She looked around it wasn't a huge room, more a cave. There was a stub of a candle burning in a small nook in the wall, and three empty pumpkin fizz crates, all with various pieces of chairs attached to them, arranged on the floor. A bag rested on top of one of them, keeping it safe from the water that seeped across the floor.

"I tried transfiguring them into something more comfortable, but I think I need a little more practise," he admitted sheepishly.

"They'll do just perfectly!" Lily exclaimed, a smile finally reaching her lips. This was just perfect, their own hideaway.

"We're under the Lake, from what I can tell," Severus added, finally answering her question.

"How on earth did you find it?" Lily asked, looking around in amazement. The cave's ceiling seemed non-existent, the cavern reaching so far up she couldn't see rock at the top, though of course, their must have been, since they were under the lake.

"Um, my mum actually told me about it," he said quietly. "Said it was a good place to go when you needed some... peace and quiet."

Lily heard the underlying meaning there. She'd seen Severus' mother at the train station and could well imagine, at least from her dour look, she hadn't been the most popular girl in school either.

"It's wonderful," Lily said to change the subject, but she meant it. This was perfect, somewhere to go where no one could bother them, not James, not Sirius, Rose. Not even Filch.

"I changed the passwords to something more suitable. You heard the one to get to the entrance, there's one on the Potions cupboard door, too. *Sirius Black is a git*."

Lily again wanted to tell him off for choosing such a silly password, but she didn't want to seem ungratefully to him for sharing this with her.

He interrupted her silence. "Anyway, where were you? What took you so long?" He sat down on one of the crates and indicated for her to do the same. She did so tentatively, a little worried the four stumpy wooden legs that sprung from the bottom of it would give way, but they held steady. She look at his face and realised he'd been worried.

Lily had almost forgotten all about her run in with Filch, distracted as she was with the discovery of the cave. It didn't take much to bring back being dragged through the halls by Filch, though. "Sorry, it was Rose again. Filch thought I was her and I got sent to Dumbledore's office!"

Severus' face softened. "I don't know why they can't tell the two of you apart. She," Severus, never referred to her sister as Rose, almost like she didn't deserve a name, "is a little bitch." Lily flinched at his words, after all, she was her twin, even if she didn't like her very much right now. "While you are..."

And he stopped again, flushed and looked down at his hands.

Lily wasn't about to let it slide this time though, not like the day in the trees.

"I am what?" Lily asked, shifting a little uncomfortably on her pumpkin fizz crate.

"Well," Severus said, then looked up at her squarely, "you're so much better than her."

Lily was surprised. Never once, in all the years Rose had been causing trouble and blaming it on her, had anyone said she was better than her sister. And she wasn't sure how she felt about it, after all Rose was her sister, but really, she made her choices and Lily made hers, and when it came down to it, she knew she at least behaved better than Rose. And after the ordeal with Filch it was just nice to know someone could separate her from her unpleasant sibling.

"Isn't this fantastic?" Severus suddenly interrupted her thoughts, and she got the distinct impression he was trying to change the subject, a hint of nervousness was in his voice. "We can sit here and talk and your sister can't bother you and we don't have to put up with those imbeciles from your House!"

Lily shot him a harsh look.

"I didn't mean all of them, I meant Potter and Black!" Severus exclaimed, his face colouring as he realised what he'd said. "And various other twits, not you Lily. Never you!"

She didn't like him summing up Gryffindor on the behaviour of two silly boys and their followers, but she did have to admit she would not miss listening to them tease her for talking to Severus, the pair of them provoking him, mimicking Rose by calling him Snivellus all the time.

Visibly shaken by his mistake, Severus began searching through the bag lying on the third crate. "I've got a present for you."

"But...but I haven't got you anything!" Lily stuttered, feeling embarrassed. She didn't have any money to buy presents with and she hadn't even thought about getting Severus a Christmas present.

Severus waved a dismissive hand at her, letting her know that didn't matter, as he came up with a roughly wrapped gift. "It's not much, really..."

Lily accepted it with more than a little intrigue as he stuffed it into her hands. He then sat back on his crate, sliding his hands back inside the arms of his robes to warm them as he waited for her to open it.

She fingered the wrapping, playing with the ribbon, wondering what it could be. It was small, and not very heavy....

"Go on then," Severus told her impatiently, nodding at her to hurry up.

Carefully, she untied the ribbon and pulled the Spellotape away from the paper. Inside lay a silver key. It was old and in need of a polish, but the intricate detail of the snakes entwined along its stem and curled around the loop at the top, their eyes shining emerald, made it absolutely stunning. It wasn't large, maybe the size of her pinkie finger, and it hung from a silver chain.

"It's another key to the door," Severus said, nodding behind her.

"It's stunning. I mean, for a key." She looked at it intensely. "Especially the eyes."

"They're just like yours," he said, suddenly ducking his head in embarrassment. "And Mum says they've been passed down over the years from Slytherin to Slytherin."

He paused, and it hit her that she wasn't Slytherin, that maybe she shouldn't have it, but he began speaking again, ignoring that irksome fact.

"She says lots of spells have been put on it over the years, good luck, protection charms... Might hold us in good stead, you never know what that bloody Potter will try as his next hilarious joke..."

"Thank you!" Lily replied, ignoring his Potter spiel. It was the key to their hideaway, and that meant the world to her, that he'd chosen her to share it with, not hidden it away to himself. Instinctively she leant across and quickly kissed his cheek before she really thought about what she was doing. His cheek was cold beneath her lips, but soft and smooth. She pulled back in surprise as a tiny shiver ran through her at their touch. She didn't move far though, sitting there, perched on the edge of her makeshift seat in shock. Shock at both what she'd done and the overwhelming desire to do it again. Severus stared back at her, his eyes darkening, his pupils dilating, a small smile curling his mouth. Tentatively, he reached out, pulling his warm hands from his robes, awkwardly placing one palm on each of her cheeks. She shivered under his touch, surprised at how nice his skin felt against hers. His thumbs traced her cheekbones, and she watched as his eyes followed the movement of his hands. She inhaled. Severus. She knew his scent well. Clean and crisp, but this close it was different, warmer. It made her heady. It all felt so surreal, like a dream. She wanted to pull away, so uncertain about what was happening, what that odd knot in her stomach meant, all the while she wanted to see what would happen, how it would feel. And so she sat there as he leaned across towards her. She closed her eyes, she'd read she was meant to do that, though she'd much rather have watched him.

His nose bumped into hers and she giggled nervously, then looked at him, wide-eyed, hoping he hadn't taken offence. She knew how much he hated his overly large nose. But he just smiled back at her with an impish grin. He waited a moment, then leaned in again, this time tilting his head a little so his nose brushed her cheek instead. Awkwardly he placed his lips against hers. This time she watched him, his dark eyes on hers as he closed in.

His lips were cold on her mouth; it wasn't exactly warm down here. It was like having soft icicles against her skin. The butterflies in her stomach stopped their fluttering and began somersaulting instead. She reached out with her own hands to touch his hair. Severus pulled her face closer to his, pressing his lips more tightly against her mouth. Her eyes widened and she gasped, jumping back. She looked at Severus, hoping he wasn't going to laugh at her, only to find him staring at her again. The awkwardness of the whole situation suddenly hit her. What was she supposed to do now? Her lips still tingled from where his had touched hers. She sucked on her bottom lip, surprised at the slightly salty taste he'd left on her. She reached up to touch her mouth, wondering at the faint electricity she felt beneath her finger. And then she started giggling, and couldn't stop.

"Have a good Christmas," Severus suddenly said, jumping to his feet and rushing out of the room. She could hear his feet, in their oversized shoes, splashing along the stone walkway, as she sat there, still staring at his now empty crate.

Lily arrived home, a little happy, a little sad. She missed Severus, but, she figured, she could go around and see him anytime, he was just down the road. And he'd more than likely come over anyway. And she'd been glad to see Petunia, to see she was all right. She'd moved to give her sister a hug, to apologise again, but Petunia had taken one stuffy look at her, turned her back and gone to her room. Lily had barely seen her in three days; Petunia hadn't even eaten dinner with the rest of them.

Finally, Christmas Eve, Lily could take it no more. Nearly a week had passed since the end of term and she hadn't heard anything from Severus. She was worried; she hadn't spoken to him since he'd kissed her in the cave. Maybe she'd done something wrong. She wracked her brains. Oh, dear gods, she'd giggled and he'd left. She'd been nervous, of course, but he probably thought she'd been laughing at him! First thing in the morning she was going to go over to his house and explain. And Petunia continued to play on her mind. She hadn't spoken a word to her since she'd arrived home and nearly a week had passed since the end of term. That was something she could do something about right now.

She went up to Petunia's room and knocked on the door, a large lump forming in her throat. When she got no reply, determinedly she turned the knob and let herself in.

"What are you doing in my room?!" Petunia yelled at her, leaping from her bed. "I don't want any of your sort anywhere near me! Freaks, all of you!"

"Tuney, please," Lily begged, desperate to talk to her sister.

"You heard what I said!" The look on her sister's face frightened her. It was full of loathing, of disgust.

"Professor Dumbledore he said you'd be angry, said you had a right to be. It's not fair, Tuney, honest it's not! I'd..." she sniffed, hiccuped as she tried to bite back her tears, "I wish it were you at Hogwarts, not Rose!"

"Professor Dumbledore said, huh?" Petunia replied haughtily. "I couldn't care less what that old freak has to say!"

"Tuney, I'm sorry! Maybe... maybe I shouldn't go back to Hogwarts, maybe I should stay here with you."

Petunia looked at her, a mix of emotions contorting her face. "No, you're one of them now. One of those freaks. It makes no difference if you go to their freaky little school or not!"

"Freaky, huh?" Lily stiffened at the sound of Rose's voice from over her shoulder. "I'll show you freaky, you Muggle!"

Lily spun around to stop Rose, but she was too late.

The words came from Rose's mouth like a deadly whisper, causing Lily to shiver as the light leapt from the end of Rose's wand, sailed across Lily's shoulder, and hit Petunia squarely in the chest.

Lily only vaguely recognised the incantation, but the massive bogies that flew from Petunia's nose, wings and all, that turned on her, attacking her horrified face, was all Lily needed to know. The Bat-Bogey Hex.

"Rose!" she screamed, turning to belt across the room to help Petunia.

"I'm not quite done yet, I don't think dear Petunia has learnt any respect!" Rose yelled furiously. "*Petri*"

Lily spun around towards Rose, and in one fluid motion, she pulled her wand from up her sleeve and waved it precisely. "*Expelliarmus!*"

Rose's wand flew through the air, landing at Lily's feet.

Lily stood there, shocked for a moment at what she'd done. She'd performed magic outside of school. She'd disarmed her own sister. Panic set in, until she heard Petunia begin to scream.

Petunia clawed at her skin, tried to rid herself of the bat-bogies. Small specks of blood littered her face where she'd scratched at it with her nails.

"Oh my..." Lily breathed anxiously. She reached out, grabbed Petunia's hands and pinned them to the bed, barely feeling the slimy brush of bat-bogey wings against her own skin, she was so worried for her sister.

"Rose" Lily began, desperately. "Make it stop!"

"I don't know how," Rose said, sounding, oddly enough, a little distraught. "I just wanted to teach her a lesson, Lil."

"Some lesson! If we don't stop this she's going to scratch her whole face off!"

Lily tried desperately to think of anything she could do, but nothing they'd learnt at school so far helped. Not even anything she'd read in books. She was so stupid, how could she have overlooked this possibility? Of course Rose would eventually turn on Petunia. And she should have been ready for it!

"Well, I don't know," Rose replied, her usual dismissive tone back.

Lily turned to glare at her, only to find Rose creeping out the bedroom door.

"Don't you dare, Rose Evans!" Lily screamed at her. "Don't you dare!"

Lily desperately thought. There was only one person she knew who might be able to stop this. She grabbed up a coat from the bed, pulling it over Petunia's shoulders and the hood over her face. The bat-bogies continued to attack Petunia, but now they simply hit the fabric of her coat. Petunia was still fighting though, still trying to push them away.

"There's one under here!" she screamed.

"Rose, come on!" Lily said, pulling Petunia to her feet.

Rose stood there, frozen to the spot. Lily hated herself for doing it, hated that she had to use her twin's tactics on her, but she had to anyway. "Rose, if you don't help me this instance, I'm going to have Severus tell all of Slytherin about Rusty the teddy you still take to bed!"

Rose paled. "Okay, okay."

Between the two of them they managed to get the struggling Petunia down the stairs, and out into the night. With a quick glance around, Lily was relieved to see no one about to witness the bat-sized bogies still attacking her sister. Quickly they pulled Petunia along the street, through the snow, finally reaching the decrepit house Severus called home.

Lily knocked on the door. "Come on, come on," she muttered under her breath.

She knocked louder. "Severus!" she yelled.

Finally, a light came on inside, heavy, ominous footsteps on bare floor boards. If the situation hadn't been so desperate, Lily would have been having a minor heart attack. She moved the still whimpering Petunia behind her, not wanting Severus' parents to see the state her sister was in.

The door creaked open. "What do you want?" The woman's overly large nose and sour-looking face were all too recognisable; she looked like a female version of Severus who'd eaten one too many Sherbet Lemons.

"Severus. I need to see him!" Lily squeaked.

The woman looked at her cautiously. "Severus is visiting relatives." She moved to close the door, but Lily put her foot in the doorjamb.

"Please, please, you've got to help us!" Lily begged her.

"I have no time for this nonsense"

Lily stepped aside, pulling Petunia up the step to the level, shoving back her hood and exposing her bloodied face, bat-bogies still attacking her, to Mrs Snape.

"You stupid girls!" the woman hissed. She shook her head, pulling her wand from her frumpy dress, and with a few murmured words, the bat-bogies vanished.

Petunia's mouth opened slightly as if to scream, but nothing came out. Looking very pale, she turned and ran from the house.

"Tuney!" Lily called, but her sister didn't stop. Lily turned back to Mrs Snape. "Thank you," she said sincerely, as much as she felt the overwhelming urge to run from the house as well. Something about the place was just wrong; it made her feel sick to the pit of her stomach.

"I suggest," the woman said darkly, "that the two of you learn to keep your magic under control."

"Yes, Mrs Snape." Lily turned to leave, but hesitated. The overwhelming dread forced her to ask, "Severus, is he all right?"

Rose huffed at her question, and left the stoop, heading back across the snow to their house.

"I don't think that's any concern of yours," the woman growled.

"I'm his friend."

Mrs Snape gave her a scathing look. "Indeed. Severus is," she paused, "fine. I told you, he's visiting relatives. Now," she sneered, "go home."

Lily turned, hearing the door click shut behind her. She walked out into the yard and stopped to look back at the house. She could have sworn she saw someone pulling the corner of a curtain down in one of the upstairs rooms. Someone who looked very much like Severus.

AN: Big hugs and plenty of booze for my darling beta, she did an absolutely fantastic job on this one, especially kicking my sorry behind over their kiss :-*

Chapter Four

Chapter 4 of 18

COMPLETE! Hermione knows his secrets, his destiny unfulfilled. Snape sees only desolate dark. But in the tale of love and longing, Lily remembers everything.

All is not as it seems. The world of wizards is full of lies and half-truths.

Over twenty years ago, Severus Snape fell in love with Lily Evans, and he never stopped loving her. His every move, his every thought, is purely for her. And he has only one place, a room, hidden deep under the lake, where he can relax, not worry about whom he is spying on, what he should be saying and doing, where his loyalties lie. Somewhere he can reminisce about his childhood days there with Lily, to allow himself space to grieve.

That though, as with everything else, is about to change.

CHAPTER FOUR

Lily returned to Hogwarts early, on a cold January day, the last day of the Christmas holidays, hoping to find Severus before school started again, to ask him where he'd been. She hadn't seen him at all over the holidays, not even had a measly owl from him. Nothing.

She was worried; maybe he didn't like her anymore. Maybe he'd rather be with the rest of the Slytherins instead. But, after searching the grounds, the buildings, and even stopping by their secret rendezvous, their cave, a few times, Lily realised he wasn't there. Crawling into bed late that night, she felt as if her heart was ripping in two. He didn't want to be her friend anymore.

She could have sworn it was Severus in that window of his house, the night she'd had to take Petunia there to get the bat-bogey hex removed, that he had been home. Why would his mother lie to her? Probably because Severus had told her to, he probably never wanted to see her again. No, that didn't feel right to her. The whole ordeal of going to the Snape house still left her with a deep-seated feeling of dread. And made her realise her own parents weren't so bad.

An owl from the ministry had come, warning both her and Rose about performing magic outside of school. The twins had spent the rest of the holidays in their rooms as punishment. Lily didn't mind so much though. Given the tension in the house, she'd rather have spent her time alone, anyway.

She'd kept herself busy, not wanting to dwell on any of it. She spent her time reading Miranda Goshawk's *Standard Book of Healing Spells* and trying to find the perfect present for Severus. She thought she'd done quite nicely! But now, back at Hogwarts, with the perfected gift stored away in her trunk, she had nothing to do at night besides stare up at the ceiling and think, and wonder if she'd ever get the chance to give it to him.

She worried that perhaps she'd said something wrong, worried about giggling after he'd kissed her that day they were down in the cave. That perhaps she should have said something to him about the kiss, but despite his rush out of there, he hadn't seemed mad.

The next day came and went without word from him.

And then she began to worry perhaps something even worse had happened. Maybe his mother hadn't let him come back.

It wasn't until the last class of the following day that she saw him. It was Potions, Slytherin with Gryffindor, and she was quite surprised, though relieved, to see him slope into class and take his usual seat next to her. His hair hung down over his face, looking, if possible, even more dishevelled and greasy than before.

"Hi!" she chirped at him, but he didn't look at her. "I've been looking everywhere for you!"

"Hello," was all he said, talking to the floor as he retrieved his books from his overflowing bag. He didn't even look at her as he opened one up and began to read, his head so low his large, hooked nose almost touched the pages.

"What's wrong?" she asked, worried.

"Nothing."

Lily was taken aback. So he was mad at her. It had to be over the kiss in the cave, she couldn't imagine what else she had done. Maybe she should say something to him about that, apologise for giggling.

"Look, Severus, I..." But the words failed her. She knew she should tell him she liked the kiss, that it was almost all she'd thought about all holidays, well that and researching her present for him. But she couldn't tell him that, not here. It was embarrassing, especially with James Potter making smoochy noises at her back.

And before she could come up with something to say, Slughorn came into the classroom and started the lesson.

She waited patiently, taking notes in her precise handwriting, trying to listen attentively, but her mind and her eyes drifted to the boy sitting next to her. He didn't move the entire time. His head hung low, his greasy hair curtaining his face from her. She kept quiet until Slughorn told them to fetch their ingredients for the lesson.

James and Sirius left their perch behind them, James calling rudely over his shoulder, "Come on, Evans, you'd better get it. Snape would trip over his nose if he stood up."

Ignoring them, she turned to Severus and tried again.

"Have I done something wrong?" Lily whispered tentatively.

He turned to look at her and her mouth dropped open. One of his eyes was black, and his lip was split.

"You couldn't ever do anything wrong, Lily." His words came out sadly. He quickly turned away from her.

"What...what happened?" she stammered, but he was on his feet on his way to the Potions cupboard, not answering her.

And she knew already. It was no secret that life at the Snape household was far from perfect. Severus had told her a little about it, but she never thought...

It made her realise, even with Petunia not talking to her and that letter that had arrived from the Ministry threatening expulsion should magic be used in their house again, that Christmas at the Evans household had not been that bad.

"Let me look," she insisted, as he sat back down at their table, pulling her wand from her pocket to heal him. Suddenly she was glad she'd spent that time over the holiday reading up on magical cures, it looked as though it was going to come in handy already. At least, she was fairly sure she could fix him up. She reached out with one hand, pushing his hair back from his face.

"Ooh, yeah, Snivellus. Let mummy make it all better," Sirius cackled from behind them.

"Leave me alone!" Severus shoved at Lily's hand, pushing her away. Her hand hit the desk and she clutched at her stinging fingers, more surprised than actually hurt.

Days passed and still Severus refused to speak with her, not uttering a word that wasn't absolutely necessary. Outside of Potions, he seemed to vanish.

And Rose was at it again. Her latest escapade, or so Lily had been told by Professor Binns as he'd commanded her into his classroom for detention, was hexing the Head Girl for taking five points off Slytherin.

Lily didn't even bother to protest her innocence this time. There seemed no point. She'd long since given up trying to convince the teachers that it wasn't her doing all these things, it was her sister. There was no point. And she felt silly going to Dumbledore after all those detentions and tellings off to tell on her sister just to clear her own name. She had more important issues on her mind.

Lily sat in detention, Professor Binns floating above his chair, snoring, as she wrote out lines. *I must not hex students in the hallway* Over and over again. But her mind was far from the punishment. Instead, she was thinking about Severus as her quill hand systematically wrote the words. Even when she sat next to him in Potions he was cold and distant. She missed him; he was her only real friend. Yes, there were girls in her dorm she talked to, but none of them knew her like Severus did. And she didn't feel like a typical Gryffindor, she wasn't loud enough or as self-assured, and so she never felt like she really fit in with any of their discussions, any of their games.

As she finished up the last line, she deposited the work before a still snoozing Professor Binns, decided against waking him, and slipped out of the room, determined to find Severus. She needed him back.

It wasn't to be just yet, though. For leaning casually against the stone walls was Rose.

"Hey, sis,' she said all too sweetly when she saw Lily. "You better not have dobbed me in."

"I should have!" Lily said indignantly, clutching her books harder, her knuckles turning white.

"Why? Can't little Lily handle not being Miss Perfect for a change?"

"I'm not perfect," Lily protested, glowering at her sister.

"I know you're not. I've seen you sneaking off with that revolting Snape boy. You wait until mum hears about that!"

"It's not like that!" Lily insisted, feeling the panic in her rising. She knew her mother wouldn't like that one little bit. And of course, immediately the kiss at the end of term popped to mind she could just imagine what would happen if her mum found out about that! But now, Rose couldn't possibly know.

Rose shrugged, unconcerned. "That's not what mum will think. I mean, unless of course you're not going to tell her anymore about the... things I get up to."

Lily sighed in defeat. She had no choice. "All right, fine. But you stop getting me into trouble!"

Rose laughed, skipping off down the hallway. "We'll see about that!" she called back over her shoulder with saccharine sweetness.

Lily finally found Severus walking across the grounds, heading back to the castle from Herbology. He walked alone, head down, hair hanging limply around his face. She barely noticed James Potter and his ever-present sidekicks huddled together pointing and giggling at Severus as she raced to catch up with him.

"Severus," she called. He didn't turn to look at her, though she did see him jump a little.

"Go away." He snubbed her, head front and forward, upping his stride towards the castle.

"Why? I wish you'd tell me what I've done!" she called, running along to keep up with him.

"You've done nothing. Forget about it," Severus snapped.

Lily was crushed. She wished he would talk to her, tell her about everything, let her try and help.

"Ooh, little Snivellus has mummy checking up on him again!" James Potter's voice echoed across the grass, Sirius and the other two boys with him laughing.

Lily turned to Severus, disgusted. It suddenly became all too clear he'd taken what they were saying to heart, ditching her over two stupid boys. "You're not seriously listening to them, are you?"

He shoved past her, picking up his pace. "You wouldn't understand."

"Wouldn't I? You think they're all my chums when we get back to Gryffindor Tower?"

Severus stopped in his tracks, and turned to look at her. She was almost relieved by his attention, relieved that his black eye and split lip had been healed, but there was something in his dark eyes, something that made her uneasy. "They tease you?"

"Of course they do. They're just a bunch of toerags," Lily replied, smiling to herself as it reminded her of their password, their cave. "But"

Severus was no longer listening, though. His face had suddenly shot red and furious. He'd dropped his books to the ground and was racing off across the grass to where James and Sirius stood, leaving Lily standing there, staring after him. It only took her a moment to realise what he was doing, but by the time she took off after him, she was too far behind.

"You...you!" Severus was yelling at James, his wand out, pointed at the boy's neck. His friends didn't look so tough now, all of them glancing at each other as James quivered in his shoes.

"Severus, no!" Lily yelled, sprinting across the lawn.

"How dare you tease her!" He was bellowing, his wand arm twitching in fury. He didn't even seem to be aware she was there, didn't seem to have heard what she'd said at all.

James' eyes were huge, his terror obvious. He didn't look cool anymore. Instead he looked like a very scared little boy.

Lily caught up with them, grabbing Severus' wrist, pulling his wand down. "Don't!" She glared at James and Sirius. "They're not worth it!"

She could see James visibly relax. "Mummy to the rescue again, Snivellus?"

Severus struggled against her hold on his wrist, trying to pull his wand arm free.

Lily glared furiously at them. "James Potter, you *are* an arrogant toerag!"

To her surprise, Severus suddenly stopped struggling.

And she turned, dragging Severus with her, trying to ignore the cackling of James Potter's ridiculous friends.

She pulled him all the way down to the cave.

"Sev, what did you do that for? They'll never leave us alone now!" she berated him, her voice shrill, bouncing off the stone walls.

"I'm not having him teasing you!" Severus was still angry, he was pacing the cave, unable to keep still.

"Oh, for goodness sakes, I'm more than capable of handling a few jibes from those two," Lily said angrily. "They're not worth getting expelled over!"

"You shouldn't have to put up with them!" Severus replied, scowling.

She sighed. "Let's just forget it, okay?"

"Forget it? I'm not just forgetting it! How dare they tease you?!" he growled, then slumped down on one of the pumpkin fizz boxes, putting his face in his hands. "It's all my fault," he said so quietly she barely heard him.

"Your fault?" Lily asked, confused.

"Yes. They only tease you because you're friends with me. You'd be better off without me."

Lily laughed. "Hardly, Severus! I've been miserable since you haven't been talking to me."

He looked up at her, the surprise on his face evident. "You have?"

"My best friend stopped talking to me. Of course I've been miserable."

Severus sighed. "I'm sorry, Lily. I just... I thought you'd be better off without me."

"Rubbish," Lily said dismissively, not wanting to let him go any further down this self-destructive line. "Let's just forget it." He made to protest, but she held up her hand to stop him and continued speaking over the top of him. "I've got a birthday present for you!" she exclaimed, trying to clam the whole situation.

"But I told you that you didn't need to," Severus replied, but his voice had softened. Lily inwardly grinned that she'd managed to distract him for now.

"Well, it's not a present exactly..."

And she pulled out an old glass pickling jar from her bag. Inside burnt a blue flame, and as she took the tin lid off, it lit up the room, warming the cave to a tolerable temperature.

"Wow," Severus said, looking at the flames with fascination. His eyes moved up to meet hers. "That spell's really complicated"

Lily blushed, so pleased he was impressed. "I read all about the spell all holidays. Can't tell you how relieved I was to get back to school and actually try it out. I mean, the first few times it flickered and died, but this one has been going for six days now."

Severus smiled, his face softened by the flame-light. "Thank you."

Lily relaxed, glad James and Sirius were forgotten. At least, for now.

Chapter Five

COMPLETE! Hermione knows his secrets, his destiny unfulfilled. Snape sees only desolate dark. But in the tale of love and longing, Lily remembers everything.

All is not as it seems. The world of wizards is full of lies and half-truths.

Over twenty years ago, Severus Snape fell in love with Lily Evans, and he never stopped loving her. His every move, his every thought, is purely for her. And he has only one place, a room, hidden deep under the lake, where he can relax, not worry about whom he is spying on, what he should be saying and doing, where his loyalties lie. Somewhere he can reminisce about his childhood days there with Lily, to allow himself space to grieve.

That though, as with everything else, is about to change.

CHAPTER FIVE

Years flew by, and things began to change. The teasing got worse, the pranks more dangerous and Rose became a bigger, more dangerous thorn in Lily's side. Dumbledore had taken to wiping Lily's file in Filch's office each year, he'd spoken to the other teachers, but still she was punished by some for Rose's troubles. She didn't blame Hogwarts staff, though, because she knew Rose had no qualms about pleading her name was Lily when she was caught, saying they'd got the wrong twin.

And Severus. Dear Severus. They still met in their cave, but it was infrequently. Sometimes weeks would lapse without her seeing him down there. And there, he was a different person, there he was kind and gentle and would talk to her for hours.

Outside their cave, Lily could see Severus slipping away from her, getting Darker. He now he hung out with a group of Slytherins a group she knew were no good, whose names she'd heard linked with that of Voldemort's more than once. Older than him, they played games far too dangerous for her liking.

James and Sirius only seemed to make things worse. With each prank, each jibe, Severus drifted further and further from her, until finally it all blew up. The day of their Defence Against the Dark Arts O.W.L. Lily had gone to find Severus, walking around the edge of the lake, to see how he thought the exam had gone, but by the time she had found him...

She didn't know what they'd said to him, but Severus stood there, screaming obscenities and hexes at James and Sirius across the lawn, his face contorted in fury. Lying on the grass, out of reach, was Severus wand. A flood of relief washed over her; if he'd been armed with his wand James and Sirius would quite possibly have been dead.

"Wash out your mouth," James spat coldly. "Scourgify!"

Lily watched on in horror as pink soap bubbles spewed from Severus' mouth, choking him.

And her paranoia about what Severus would do to them evaporated. How dare they attack him while he was defenceless! She knew how much helping him out egged Potter and Black on, but she couldn't just stand by and let them torture him. "Leave him ALONE!" she screamed at them.

James turned towards her, and the change in his attitude was immediate. She watched him primp himself, running his fingers through her hair and pulling himself up straight. He looked like a complete idiot.

"All right, Evans?" James asked, putting on a suddenly masculine voice.

"Leave him alone," Lily repeated, angrily. "What has he done to you?" Her hands moved to her hips as she wanted impatiently for his answer.

"Well," said James, appearing to deliberate the point, "it's more the fact that he exists, if you know what I mean..."

Lily bristled as she heard laughter from the surrounding students.

"You think you're funny," she said coldly. "But you're just an arrogant, bullying toerag, Potter. Leave him *alone*."

"I will if you go out with me, Evans," said James quickly. "Go on...go out with me and I'll never lay a wand on old Snivelly again."

Gods, he had to be joking. Going out with Potter was the worst fate she could imagine. She saw Severus beginning to recover over James' shoulder, inching towards his wand. She had to do something, say something, keep them all distracted before someone got seriously hurt.

"I wouldn't go out with you if it was a choice between you and the giant squid," Lily replied haughtily.

"Bad luck, Prongs," said Sirius briskly, not sounding particularly sorry as he turned back to Snape. "OI!"

But he was too late; Snape directed his wand straight at James; there was a flash of light and a gash appeared on the side of James' face, spattering his robes with blood. Severus, no, Lily thought. Please, just stop it!

James whirled around, and with another flash of light, Snape was hanging upside-down in the air, his robes falling over his head to reveal skinny, pallid legs and a pair of greying underpants.

Lily heard everyone gathered around them laugh, saw James' friends practically rolling on the ground at the hilarity.

She was absolutely furious. How could they?! She could feel the mortification for him rolling over her. She stood there, frozen to the spot in horror. But then, watching Severus, she saw it. It was small, but still very visible from her stand point. A tiny flower tattooed on the pasty skin of his hip. A lily. She felt her lips tug into a smile, her mouth twitch. But then she was drawn back to reality, the reality where James Potter was torturing her friend. Her smile vanished and furiously, she demanded, "Let him down!"

"Certainly," said James and he jerked his wand upwards; Snape fell into a crumpled heap on the ground. Slowly he stumbled to his feet, but before he was completely upright, Sirius hit him with, "*Petrificus Totalus*!"

Severus hit the ground with a dull thud, his body rigid as a board.

"LEAVE HIM ALONE!" Lily shouted, drawing her own wand, waving it at Black and Potter. Anger seethed through her and she fought to control her actions. Sirius and James eyed her wand warily.

"Ah, Evans, don't make me hex you," said James earnestly.

"Take the curse off him, then!" Lily yelled, her wand wavering in fury.

James sighed and muttered the counter curse.

"There you go," James said as Snape struggled to his feet again. "You're lucky Evans was here, Snivellus"

Severus glared furiously at them all, Lily included. "I don't need help from filthy little Mudbloods like her!"

Lily blinked. He'd just called her...called her...she couldn't even think it.

"Fine," she said coolly. "I won't bother in future." And, feeling hurt, she added, "And I'd wash your pants if I were you, Snivellus."

"Apologise to Evans!" James roared at Snape, threatening him with his wand.

"I don't want you to make him apologise," Lily spat, rounding on James. "You're as bad as he is."

"What?" yelled James. "I'd NEVER call you a you-know-what!"

"Messing up your hair because you think it looks cool to look like you've just got off your broomstick, showing off with that stupid Snitch, walking down corridors and hexing anyone who annoys you just because you can I'm surprised your broomstick can get off the ground with that fat head on it. You make me SICK."

She glared down at him, so angry no words would come. A look of mortification crossed Severus' face, but Lily refused to care. How dare he! And he...he was supposed to be her best friend. She felt cheated, stupid and humiliated all at once.

She turned on her heel and hurried away, fighting back the tears that stung at her eyes.

James called after her, but she didn't look back. Severus didn't say a word.

She'd gone to his rescue, and what had she got in return? Mudblood, he'd said. Right to her face. She'd been stunned, shocked....

And she'd said he was as bad as James Potter and from the look on Severus' face, that had been just as bad as what he'd said.

Severus had tried to apologise, sat outside Gryffindor tower for hours waiting for her to come out. And she'd turned him away.

Lily had taken to holing herself up in the library, spending all of her spare time there, whiling away the last few days of school before the summer holidays. There she didn't have to deal with James and Sirius, there Severus couldn't come begging for forgiveness. Madam Pince would toss all three boys out in the blink of an eye.

"Hey, sis." Lily looked up, to find Rose standing on the other side of the table she sat at, pouring over *Hogwarts: A History*.

"What do you want?" Lily snapped.

"Oh such a sisterly greeting," Rose replied with a smirk. "I just thought you'd like to know that Severus is looking for you."

Lily felt a pang of guilt hit her, but she quickly brushed it aside. He'd called her a Mudblood! "Whatever. Leave me alone."

Rose looked across the library and Lily's eyes followed. She saw Madam Pince glaring at them as she finished off packing up for the night. Lily began gathering her books.

"Okay. Besides, I've got more fun to be had," Rose replied, and Lily wondered at the malicious gleam in her eye. No, she wouldn't care. What Rose did was Rose's business.

Lily finished retrieving her belongings and left the library with a smile at Madam Pince. The woman simply nodded in return, looking relieved at calling it a day.

She walked through the almost silent corridors. It was nearly curfew and Lily was going to be cutting it close to make it back to Gryffindor Tower in time, but that was the way she liked it nowadays, to slip in the Portrait hole and straight up to bed, giving James and Sirius no chance to talk to her.

She rounded the corner and the sight that met her froze her in her steps.

Severus stood there, backed up against one stone wall, Rose before him, her hands on his chest. Her sister was touching her Severus!

Lily's heart leapt into her throat, stopped beating and settled there as a hard lump. Surely Severus wouldn't turn to her sister! But there he was, letting her touch him.

"Lily?" he asked her, looking confused.

She wanted to scream out, wanted to tell him no, it wasn't her. But some morbid part of her wanted to see what would happen, if Severus would know it was Rose, not her.

And so she watched on, her breathing stopped as Rose stood up on her toes and kissed him. And not just a peck, it was a kiss to rival those she'd seen Sirius accosting many of the female population of Hogwarts with.

Lily's eyes filled with tears. He was supposed to be hers. Only hers.

"Rose!" Severus hissed, shoving at her, pushing her to the ground. "Get off me!" He was furious, absolutely livid. His face flamed red, his eyes shooting her looks good enough to kill. Lily felt herself draw breath again into her starved lungs.

"What does it matter who I am?" Rose retorted, with a smirk. "I look like her, don't I?" Lily's anger surfaced, forcing her to clench her fist so tight she could feel her fingernails almost piercing her palm. Of all the things Rose had done, all the trouble she'd got Lily into, this was the pinnacle. Now she was trying to steal Severus, her Severus.

"You could never be her!" Severus bellowed, looking down at her in disgust.

"I could," Rose said with a smirk. "I could do far more for you, Severus, than she does."

Lily saw a thin line of blood trickle down Severus' chin from his lip. Rose had bitten him. The sight of his blood tipped her over the edge and Lily's rage overtook her.

"I've had it! This is it, Rose Evans!"

She drew her wand from her sleeve, dropping all her books to the ground as she did so. Rose looked terrified for a moment, but Lily, even in her fury, noted the look of confusion when she turned her wand on herself. "*Sectumsemptra!*"

And she hacked at her hair, shouting Severus' hex over and over until she stood surrounded by a puddle of her own red locks. "No one will ever mistake us again, Rose!"

Rose sat on the floor, cross-legged and looked at her, perplexed. "Hey Lil," Rose called to her. "I've been thinking it was time we had a hair cut. Nice idea, sis. I'll get right on it. *Sectumsemptra*, wasn't it?"

Frustration swooped over her, tightening her muscles into knots. It wasn't fair! How could her own sister do this to her? Looking down, seeing all her hair, all her lovely hair at her feet, Lily burst into tears. She should have known better, known that wouldn't stop Rose. She'd been so angry, she couldn't think straight. She still was.

"Lily!" Severus called, stepping over her twin, and rushing along the hall to her.

"Leave me alone!" Lily shouted back angrily. But he didn't stop, he came to her, taking her by her arms, holding her. And she collapsed against him, sobbing.

"Oh, Lily," he sighed, holding her head to his chest. She heard Rose leaving, her footsteps disappearing down the hall. She heard the rustle of Severus' robes as he pulled his wand from them, heard the tiny murmur of "*Accio Lily's hair*." And then she let him take her by the hand and lead her down to the dungeons.

She followed him numbly into Dungeon Five, trudged along the tunnel to their cave in silence, neither of them speaking a word, save for Severus' muttering the passwords, until Severus had locked the door behind them.

"Lily," he said with a sigh, looking at the hanks of hair he held in his fist. "Why on earth"

"I'm so sick of her!" she declared. "I don't care what I have to do, no one is going to mistake me for her again!" She pulled her wand towards herself again, but Severus hands closed over hers, plucked it from her fingers and put it gently down on a pile of books stacked on one of the pumpkin fizz boxes.

She sat down in defeat, her head in her hands.

"Oh, Lily," Severus said again. "Why did you have to use *that* spell. I... I've never managed to reattach anything severed by that." She looked up and saw him looking forlornly at her hair. "This is all my fault, I never should have made that up, I never"

Lily looked from the strands of her hair in his hands to him, and suddenly it didn't matter. Severus had come to her help her, he didn't think her a Mudblood. No more than she thought he was as bad as James Potter.

"It doesn't matter," she told him earnestly.

Severus looked at her. He leant across, touching her jagged, cropped hair. "You're right. You look as beautiful as ever."

She looked at him in surprise, then felt herself smile for the first time in days.

"But, I think I know precisely how we can get one over on Rose. She's bound to be back in her room playing hair dressers now, cutting her hair just as short as yours."

Severus reached over to a pile of books he had stacked on the spare box, Lily's wand perched on top. Carefully he selected one, and began searching its contents. Lily watched on, intrigued. "Here we go!" he exclaimed triumphantly.

He pulled his wand from his robes, pointing it at Lily. "Hold still. *Augmentum Crinitus*." And Lily could feel her scalp tingling, then, out the corners of her eyes, she saw her hair growing, slowly, inch by inch, until it was just as it had been before. She touched her head, pleased to feel it all back.

Lily laughed. "Rose is going to go nuts in the morning when she realises I've got my hair back!"

"I certainly hope so," Severus said with a grin. He paused, ran his tongue over his lip, swollen as it was from where Rose had taken a bite at him. Turning his wand on himself, he quickly fixed it, cleaning up the trail of dried blood as well.

Lily looked on in quiet disgust. She couldn't understand, and doubted she ever would, why Rose had thought Severus might enjoy that.

"Your sister appears to be a closet vampire," Severus said with a dismissive laugh.

Lily felt a tiny smile tug at the corners of her mouth.

Severus' face suddenly turned serious again. "And now, there's just one more thing to fix," he said quietly, leaning over towards her, his hands in her hair, his fingers teasing her still tingling scalp, his face mere inches from hers. "I'll be damned if the last person I have kissed is going to be her." And he closed the gap between them, his lips meeting hers. His mouth was warm on hers, soft against her skin. It was so different from the last time he'd kissed, back in first year, but Lily felt her heart flutter exactly the same. Her insides turned to a pool of mush as he parted his lips, tracing the line of her mouth with his tongue. She wanted this, she needed it. Slowly, she moved her lips apart, allowing him in. He moved slowly, teasing at the soft flesh, tracing the lines of her lips with his tongue, then gently he began exploring her mouth. Lily felt a jolt run through her, a shivering thrill. She never imagined it could be like this, so perfectly right. His fingers pressed firmly into her hair, pulling her closer, his kiss becoming more determined. She could smell him, the same musky scent she'd caught in her first year, but even more intoxicating.

She could lose herself here, with him touching her, with the outside world forgotten forever.

But first, first she had to have some answers.

She pulled away from him, her hand on his chest gently pushing him back.

He looked at her, distress apparent in his eyes. "Lily, I'm sorry! I shouldn't have..."

She smiled. "Yes, you should have, Sev."

The relief washed over his features like a tidal wave, only to be quickly replaced by confusion.

She drew a deep breath, gathering the courage to ask him. Finally, speaking so quickly she was amazed he understood her, she said, "You called me a Mudblood."

Severus dropped his eyes to the floor, red colouring his cheeks. "I'm so sorry, Lily. I... Potter...." He stopped, closed his eyes and paused before speaking again, looking up at her, his dark eyes pleading with her. "I wasn't thinking. It was stupid. Potter had me so angry...." Lily saw his fists clench and unclench. "He gets on my nerves like you wouldn't believe."

She reached down and took his hands in hers. "I know. It doesn't matter." She had what she wanted; he really hadn't meant it. It had been hurtful words spoken in the heat of battle, aimed at the wrong person. "But why let him?" Lily said, trying to reason with him.

"Why do you let Rose do it to you?"

Lily flushed. He was right, they were one and the same.

"They're not worth it," she said quietly. "None of them are worth it."

"Only one thing is worth it," Severus replied, tugging gently on her hands and pulling her to her feet. And he kissed her again. Not softly this time, this time it was all the pent up anger, all the frustration, all the longing, and she returned it stroke for stroke. Their tongues tangled, her body pressed against his as she tilted her head back to reach him. She stepped closer still, needing to know he was really there. That he was hers.

Severus let out a moan into her mouth, his hand on her lower back holding her to him. She felt the hard bulge of the front of his trousers pressing into her stomach and her insides flip-flopped, a rush of warmth radiating from her insides. He backed her up, pressed her against the wall. His hands wandered her body, stroking her sides, circling her hip, his mouth never letting up. And she gave as good as she got, kissing him back fiercely, her hands exploring his chest through his shirt. She was surprised at the hard muscles she felt beneath; sure he was still lanky, but he was no longer a weedy kid.

Lily shivered as she felt one hand drift up her side, first tentatively touching the outer edge of her breast through her jersey, then sliding across, cupping her, his fingers like liquid heat through the wool to her skin.

She moaned softly, pressing herself more firmly into his hand.

But his fingers left her. Her eyes flew open, staring into his, but there she saw a greedy glint, and felt his hands tugging at the hem of her jersey, then fingers slide beneath, over the skin of her stomach, pressing the fabric up as he moved, until he was tracing along the lower edge of her bra.

"Severus," she said, half in protest, half in need.

"Gods, Lil, you have no idea..." And his fingers slid beneath her bra, touching the soft skin of her breasts. She drew in a sharp breath, feeling her knees weaken at his touch. They traced lightly at first, then found her nipples, rolling each in his fingers. A pang of longing hit her, and for a moment her eyes fell shut and she would have let him do anything he wanted with her. Anything at all.

"I want you as mine, Lily. Always."

Her eyes flew open and she stared up at him. No, she was not going to do this now. Yes, one day, one day she would lose her virginity and it would be to Severus, at least she hoped it would, but now wasn't right. An hour ago she'd loathed him.

She put her hands around his forearms and tugged them away.

Looking panic stricken, he stepped back, his hands dropping to his sides. He looked at the floor. "Sorry."

"I" she tried to speak, but the words wouldn't come.

"No, don't Lily. I know. I don't know why I thought" His words broke off again, followed by a heavy sigh. "I'm certainly not good enough for you."

He turned away, picking up a couple of books from the stack, preparing to leave.

"Severus," Lily said quickly, and he glanced at her. When he saw the look on her face, his eyes didn't leave. "It's not that at all! Not good enough for me? Nonsense! I just don't want to, I'm not ready, I" She paused. "No one's ever done that to me before."

A small smile tugged at Severus' mouth. "Neither have I, Lil. I hardly have girls queuing up for me."

She smiled. "I'm glad," she replied. Then she went on, "Things just haven't been so... great recently." Understatement of the decade, she thought. "I think we should just wait, see how things go..." What she really wanted to know was that he was going to stop all this nonsense, everything with Potter, all the Dark Arts rubbish, but she couldn't demand that of him. He needed to do that on his own.

"I'm not going to push you into anything you don't want to do, Lil," he said earnestly. "And things are going to change. No more Potter, no more Rose. It's you and me and the rest can be damned!"

Lily hoped beyond hope what he said was true.

AN: A huge thanks once again to my stunning beta and her wonderful whip :-*

Legal stuff: Parts of this chapter contain quoted material from Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix - no copyright infringement intended, just having some fun!

Chapter Six

Chapter 6 of 18

COMPLETE! Hermione knows his secrets, his destiny unfulfilled. Snape sees only desolate dark. But in the tale of love and longing, Lily remembers everything.

All is not as it seems. The world of wizards is full of lies and half-truths.

Over twenty years ago, Severus Snape fell in love with Lily Evans, and he never stopped loving her. His every move, his every thought, is purely for her. And he has only one place, a room, hidden deep under the lake, where he can relax, not worry about whom he is spying on, what he should be saying and doing, where his loyalties lie. Somewhere he can reminisce about his childhood days there with Lily, to allow himself space to grieve.

That though, as with everything else, is about to change.

The summer holidays held hope for Lily, and they certainly started off well. Lily's mother was absolutely furious with Rose when she saw what she'd done to her hair. Rose begged with Lily to fix it, but Lily flat out refused. Oh, she had every intention of fixing it before they returned to school, but, for now, Rose could squirm. A taste of her own medicine might taste foul, but it would hopefully do the trick. Not to mention, that with Lily holding the cards with regards to Rose's hair, her sister would say nothing against her to either of their parents.

Petunia, now eighteen, had gone away for the holidays with her new boyfriend. Lily got the distinct impression that her mother was none too pleased with this Dursley boy, but nothing was ever said. And in some ways, Petunia's absence was a relief. There would be no tiptoeing around the oldest Evans sister this year.

And Severus had been over every day since the holidays began. Lily felt so light, she practically floated around the house.

And, true to his word, he hadn't mentioned Potter all holidays, and he hadn't pushed her any further than she'd let him, though they had spent a fair amount of time tentatively exploring each other in the confines of Lily's tiny bedroom when her parents weren't around.

"I think I've got the answer to the Rose problem," Severus announced one day as they sat in the shadows under the same patch of trees they had years ago.

"Oh?" Lily asked, arching an inquisitive brow at him.

"It's a jinx. Mother's invention, actually," he replied, pulling a piece of parchment from his pocket. To all appearances, it was simply blank. Taking it from him, she turned it over in her hands. No, there was nothing on it.

"But..." she began, looking up at him, then stopped as she saw him reach into his cloak for something else.

He pulled out a quill and ink, handing them to Lily with great flourish. "How's your dictation?"

Lily gave him an odd look, but pulled the cork out of the ink bottle.

"*I, Rose Evans,*" Severus began, leaning over her shoulder to watch as she placed quill to parchment.

"Wait, this isn't magic, is it?" Lily asked quickly, her eyes flicking back round to him, frowning.

"What? Afraid the Dementors will come and get poor little Lily?" Severus teased, running his fingers through her hair, a grin on his face.

Lily blushed.

"No, it's not magic," he reassured her. "At least, you writing on it isn't. I managed to get mother to do that."

"How...?" Lily couldn't imagine Severus getting his mother to do anything for him.

"Never mind that. *I, Rose Evans,*" Severus repeated, and after a little pause, Lily wrote as he said.

"*Promise never to pretend to be,*" he continued, "*my stunningly beautiful...*" His fingers brushed her hair from her face, his lips flitting over the skin of her neck and making her shiver.

"Severus!" Lily protested lightly, her writing shaking as he touched her.

"*Highly intelligent,*" he moved further up her neck, teasing the sensitive skin behind her ear. Lily quivered, nearly dropping her quill. "*Superior sister ever again*"

"I'll just put sister," Lily said with a giggle. She finished up writing, and waited expectantly for the rest. When he said no more, simply continued to accost her neck, she asked, "That's it?"

"Hardly," he whispered against her skin, his fingers stroking the bare skin of her shoulder that showed around the straps of her dress. "I'm far from finished with you, Lily Evans."

"I meant the writing," Lily replied with a laugh, swatting at his arm.

"Oh, yes," Severus agreed, plucking the parchment and quill from her hand and placing it on the ground. "Quite enough of that."

He lowered her to the grass, pinning her under his weight. "Now to check you really are Lily, not her idiotic sister playing games again," he told her with a sly smile, his dark hair framing his face.

He lowered his head. His mouth closed over hers, stealing her breath away. Lily kissed him back, enjoying the feel of his lips on hers, his tongue gliding over hers. She shifted a little beneath him, trying to get comfortable on the hard ground beneath her back. Severus groaned, his hips rolling, pressing into hers, his arousal pressing through their clothes into her pelvis.

Lily pulled away. She didn't want him getting too carried away, she wasn't ready for this yet, ready to take their relationship any further, and certainly not here where everyone and their house elves could see them. Quickly she spoke, trying to distract him, "So, now what? I need to get her to sign it?"

Severus drew a deep breath, sighed, then propped himself up on his elbows. "Yes. Should be easy enough she knows you can't do magic outside of school and she wants her hair to grow back."

"And what will happen to her?"

"Absolutely nothing. Assuming she stays true to her word," Severus replied with a grin.

"Sign it," Lily demanded, dropping the parchment in front of Rose.

Rose looked up from her lunch. "Excuse me?"

"Sign it," Lily repeated, shoving her quill at her sister. "If you want your hair back, you are going to have to give me your word that you're not going to pretend to be me ever again."

Rose read through the short note, picked the page up and tentatively turned it over like she expected it to bite her. Finally, she took the quill from Lily and wrote her name on the bottom of it. "Happy?" Rose snapped, raising one eyebrow.

Lily nodded.

"Well, get on with it then!" Rose demanded, tugging at the inch long hair on her scalp.

"No, you'll have to wait until we get back to school. You know I can't do magic...." Lily's words caught in her throat though, as she saw the short red hairs on her sister's head extending, rapidly growing down past her ears. Lily held her breath, worried about what sort of enchantments Mrs Snape had placed on the parchment, but when Rose's hair stopped midway down her back and Rose appeared unharmed, Lily felt herself breathe again.

"Nice one, sis," Rose commented, tugging at her hair as if to check it were real. "Well, I've got some things to do. Catch you in school, Rose. I mean, Lily!" Rose tossed her sister a smirk, and sauntered from the kitchen.

Lily shook her head, some things would never change.

"So, you got her to sign it?"

Lily turned to find Severus standing in the doorway, a grin on his face.

"Yes," Lily replied, smiling back. "But what is going to happen to her if she doesn't keep her word?"

"You'll see."

Lily eyed him suspiciously.

"Oh, it's nothing bad. Well, nothing that'll scar her for life," Severus replied, looking thoroughly amused, but something in his eyes put her at ease.

"Alright then, I'll let you have your fun," she answered, looking over at the doorway her sister had just left through. "I'm sure I won't have to wait long."

"Not long at all." Severus closed the space between them in two strides of his long legs. He bent down and kissed her lips softly. "I don't believe I saw dear mother and father Evans' car in the driveway?"

"They're out antique hunting for the day," Lily replied, amused by the hopeful look in Severus' eyes.

"Well then, there's a few things I must discuss with you upstairs."

Severus sat down on the edge of her bed, grabbed hold of her wrist and pulled her, giggling, down on to the bed beside him. He looked so oddly out of place in her pink flowery room, his ivory complexion and ebony hair starkly contrasted against the pastel hues.

"So," Lily said, running a finger across his chest, and looking cheekily up at him, "what was it you wanted to discuss, Severus?"

"Well, not discuss so much as orate." And he kissed her, drawing out all those thrilling emotions once more.

"And perhaps just a little practical," Severus muttered against her lips, his hands sliding over the exposed skin of her stomach where her top had ridden up. Lily drew a sharp breath; his skin was cool against hers.

He pulled back, looking at her, his dark eyes delving into her mind, or so it seemed. And with a curl of his lips, obviously satisfied at what he saw, he slid down her body, kissing her bare stomach. He took his time, kissing his way back up, until he had her T-shirt off over her head. Lily flushed a little in embarrassment. Even wearing her bra, she'd never exposed this much of herself to him before.

"It's okay, Lil," he whispered, kissing her lips again. And he was right. It really was okay. More than.

He shifted again, his fingers tracing the top edge of her plain white bra, teasing her skin. "May I?" he asked, reaching around behind her, his hands on the clasp at the back.

She pondered for a moment. She wanted to, she really did, but Rose was home and she didn't want to lead him on. She still didn't feel ready for sex, heck, she wasn't even of age yet. And though Severus had taught her breaking the rules was sometimes fun, she had this niggling doubt in the back of her head there was a good reason why she should wait until she was seventeen.

"Just your bra, Lily, I promise," Severus said, soothingly. "You know you can tell me to stop the moment you don't like it."

Lily smiled, and found herself nodding.

He struggled for a while with the clasp, but eventually she felt it pop free, the fabric on her chest loosening. Severus was watching her intently, his gaze intimidating and intimate all at once. Slowly, he slid the straps down her shoulders, off over her wrists, never once leaving her eyes. Severus kissed her lightly once more, before sliding his body and his gaze down her torso.

He reached out, his fingers feather-light as he touched her. She looked down to see his pale fingers against her own pale skin. A perfect match. He circled her breasts, experimenting with his touch, sometimes light, sometimes a little firmer, never touching her nipples. Lily found need growing inside of her, her hips bucking slightly under him. His eyes met hers, a satisfied grin on his face.

"Please," she whimpered.

"Anything you want, Lily. Anything." And his thumbs brushed over the hardened nubs of her nipples, sending a delightful jolt through her.

His mouth soon followed, kissing her breasts, gliding his silky tongue over her skin. Finally, he drew one nipple into his mouth, sucking gently.

The fingers of one hand trailed down her side, down her leg, sliding under the hem of her skirt. For a while he stilled, his warm hand simply resting on her smooth skin, his mouth still teasing her nipple, his lips tugging harder on it. She whimpered.

Severus' hand began to slide up her leg, up the inside of her knee, to her thigh, creeping ever closer to her damp knickers. It would be so easy to just let him continue, to let him do as he wished. But no, not yet.

Lily grasped his arm and pulling it away.

He looked up at her. "Sorry, Lil. I'm so sorry."

Why was he always apologising to her?

"It's okay, Sev," Lily replied, but the moment was broken. He kissed her gently once more and slid off her.

They sat there awkwardly for a moment, before Lily retrieved her clothes, feeling embarrassed sitting there with her upper half bare. It reminded her too much of Severus being hung upside down by Potter.

Wait. That was something she'd wanted to find out more about.

"Can I see it?" Lily asked suddenly.

"See what?" Severus asked, looking confused.

"Your tattoo!" Lily exclaimed.

Severus blushed furiously. "What tattoo?"

"Severus Snape, you are a terrible liar! You know what tattoo!"

Lily watched as he rubbed at his hip, then, as he saw her looking, quickly pulled his hand away. "No."

"Oh, go on! Please?"

"No!"

Lily turned on him, knocking him flat on his back on the bed. "You just said anything I wanted, Severus."

"Did I? Well, that was silly, wasn't it?" he replied, but he made no move to stop her as she reached for his belt. She tugged at it, trying to free it from the buckle. As she moved, her wrist brushed the front of his trousers.

Severus moaned. "Careful, Lil. I'm balancing on the edge of control, here."

She blushed, quickly lifting her hands from him, using her just her precise fingers. Finally, she pulled it free, followed by the top button of his trousers. As she worked her way down, she was all too aware of the firm bulge beneath the fabric. Furiously, she tried to ignore it as her reddened cheeks gave her away.

He gasped, grasped her wrists and pulled her hands away.

"Let me see it!" she demanded.

"No."

"Go on!"

He looked at her, deliberating for a moment before undoing the rest of the buttons himself.

She grinned at him as she pulled down the band of his trousers. Underneath, she didn't find the greying underwear she expected, instead he had on black. A feeling of guilt washed over her as she remembered what she'd said to him, but she pushed it aside. There was no point dwelling on what had been said, they'd both been at fault.

She found her eyes drawn to the front of the underwear though, wondering at the length she could see beneath, before she averted her eyes. And there it was, on his hip, the tiny tattoo, though it wasn't so small up-close. About the size of her palm. And it was pretty, intricate. A vivid purple, tipped in black, everything was there, the brush strokes, the stamen with their bright yellow pollen, and even several emerald green leaves.

"It's beautiful. And not as small as I remember."

She looked up at him, expecting to find him watching her. Instead, he had a look of horror on his face, his eyes fixed on her door.

Lily felt her gut wrenching as she paused, not wanting to look. But she had to.

"Get. Out. Of. My. Daughter's. Bedroom."

Lily's eyes bulged at the look on her father's face. His face was red, veins pulsing in his forehead, his fists clenched.

"Dad!" Lily squeaked, looking back at Severus and realising what he saw, what he thought he saw. His daughter straddling some young oik, inspecting what lay beneath his trousers. "Dad, no, it's not like that!"

"Don't! Just don't!" Her father was glaring so hard Lily worried his eyes might pop right out. "Didn't you hear me, boy? I said get out!"

Severus leapt from the bed, tripping over his trousers as he did. Hastily he picked himself up from the floor, yanked his trousers up and shot out the door.

"Daddy..." Lily began again.

"Don't 'Daddy' me, Lily Evans. This is the kind of thing I expected from your sister, not you!"

"But..."

"But nothing. You are not to see that boy again. Ever!"

Lily stayed in her room, not daring to go out to join everyone for dinner. She sat there, stunned, listening to Rose and her parents strained conversation over dinner, hearing Rose leave for her room, the door clicking shut, then the hushed voices of her parents.

"I am not standing for it!" The sudden bellow in the almost silent house made Lily jump. "I am going over there and telling that boy's mother I will not stand for it!"

And then Lily listened in terror as she heard the front door slam. Her father had no idea, no idea what Mrs Snape was like. She couldn't let him go over there, completely unarmed. She ran from her room, pounding down the footpath behind him, finally catching up to him as he was banging on the Snapes' door, hitting it so hard with his fists Lily thought he might break it down.

"Dad, don't!" Lily pleaded with him.

"I am not having you see him again, Lily," he said in a harsh whisper. "Never again, you here me?"

"Fine, I won't see him again. Let's just go home. Please?"

But at that moment, the front door was wrenched open. Glowering, Mrs Snape loomed in the doorway, surveying the pair of them.

"Oh, it's you again," she said to Lily, sounding disgusted.

"Again?" Lily's father bellowed, glaring at his daughter. He turned back to Mrs Snape. "I do not want your son coming near my daughter again! Do you know what he's done to her? She's just a child! A child!"

Mrs Snape eyed her father. "Fine."

"Fine? Fine?!" Mr Evans yelled.

"I had no idea this was the girl that has my son so besotted. I assure you, it won't be happening again. I don't wish for my son to be consorting with..." Mrs Snape looked Lily over from head to toe, then took in her father's appearance, "with her sort, anyway."

"What is that supposed to mean?" Mr Evans demanded.

"It means the Snape family does not associate with Mudbloods."

Mr Evans looked confused. Like he wanted to yell at her, but obviously had no idea what she'd just called his daughter.

"Come on, Daddy, let's go," Lily said, tugging urgently at his arm, trying to pull him away.

Mr Evans stared at the woman, his mouth open to start yelling again, but it simply closed again, floundering for something to say.

"Dad, she's a witch. Come on," Lily urged. Finally, he seemed to snap back to life.

"Fine. You just tell your son what I said." And he turned away, pulling Lily back to the house.

"Oh, I assure you," Mrs Snape's chilling voice resounded in Lily's ears, "my son will get the message."

Fear gripped Lily like a hangman's noose about her neck.

She turned back around, looking up at the house, hoping to see Severus at his window, hoping she could warn him. But he wasn't there.

Her father dragged her home, his hand gripped her arm tightly, so hard it hurt. Lily didn't care though, she doubted the pain was anything compared to what Severus was going to have to endure.

"Severus!" she screamed back at the house, but the only response was the creak of the front door as Mrs Snape pulled it shut.

A big thank you to my beta for all her help with IT :-)

Chapter Seven

Chapter 7 of 18

COMPLETE! Hermione knows his secrets, his destiny unfulfilled. Snape sees only desolate dark. But in the tale of love and longing, Lily remembers everything.

All is not as it seems. The world of wizards is full of lies and half-truths.

Over twenty years ago, Severus Snape fell in love with Lily Evans, and he never stopped loving her. His every move, his every thought, is purely for her. And he has only one place, a room, hidden deep under the lake, where he can relax, not worry about whom he is spying on, what he should be saying and doing, where his loyalties lie. Somewhere he can reminisce about his childhood days there with Lily, to allow himself space to grieve.

That though, as with everything else, is about to change.

Lily tried to send an owl to Severus, but her father had caught her. He then confiscated both the letter *and* the owl she and Rose shared. So Lily tried sneaking out to find Severus instead, but her mother caught her.

Rose smirked and Lily flushed throughout their mother's lecture concerning their 'precious gift'; not something to be given away lightly, apparently. She tuned out, or at least tried to. Precious gift? The only thing Lily had lost this holiday was her owl. Their mum asked if she was listening. Mumbling her assent, she buried her chin in her hands and wished she knew a really good disappearing spell.

Finally, she'd given up trying to contact Severus and just stayed in her room weeping, sometimes out of fear, sometimes out of anger, sometimes both at the same time. By the time the holidays ended and she was to return to school, she was exhausted.

It wasn't until they'd pulled out of King's Cross on the Hogwarts Express that Lily finally got a chance to see Severus. He was tucked off in a corner of a carriage, two quivering first years sitting across from him. The relief that washed over her when she saw him, still in one piece, was like a tidal wave. But he paid her no attention, simply stared out the window.

"Severus?" Lily asked, keeping her distance. Something was wrong. Very wrong.

"Go away, Evans."

Lily was taken aback. He wouldn't even look at her.

"Sev..."

"I said, go away."

"Why?" she demanded angrily.

"Because I..." His voice trailed off. "Because I don't love you anymore." But Lily heard it, the slight crack in his voice.

She moved into the carriage and sat down next to him. She reached out to touch him, but he scooted along the seat, pressed right up against the wall, putting as much distance as possible between them.

"I know that's not true, Severus," Lily said, and was finally rewarded by him looking at her. She smiled as she saw his face. "You're okay!"

"I'm getting much better at those Healing Charms, Lily." The bitterness of his voice pierced her heart.

"What did she do to you?" Lily whispered, reaching out a hand to touch him, to make sure he really was okay. Her fingers barely brushed his cloak before a sharp bolt wrenched through her, knocking her back.

He leapt from his seat. "Don't touch me!" he bellowed. The two tiny first years looked terrified at one another then ran from the carriage. Quieter, Severus begged, "Please, don't touch me."

Her fingers burned, and looking down she saw tiny blisters forming on their tips.

"What on earth was that?" she asked, looking from her scorched fingers up to Severus.

"Another one of mother's little inventions," Severus replied angrily.

"Well, can't we fix it?" Lily asked.

"You don't think I've tried? I spent the last two days researching, up all night trying to find anything to remove it. But everything I've tried since I got on the train hasn't done a damn thing."

"We'll fix it," Lily insisted. "We'll go to the library. We'll talk to Madam Pomfrey...."

"I doubt any of that will work. I'm sure this isn't exactly the sort of thing you'd find in any of the Hogwarts books, Lily. Mother always had a fascination with the Dark Arts."

Lily left the Great Hall with her fellow Gryffindors, feeling full and tired after the huge welcome feast.

She had watched Severus over dinner, had seen him smile bitterly at her. No, she wasn't just going to sit back and let his mother get away with this. They would find the cure.

"Severus!" Lily called, as she saw his retreating back a little further up the corridor.

He looked around, glanced at his fellow Slytherins, then hung back, waiting for her, looking a little uncomfortable.

"Are you okay?" Lily asked, worried at the way Mulciber and Avery were looking back at them from down the corridor.

"I'm fine," Severus said, but his voice was a little terse.

"You're fine, but...?"

Severus sighed. "You'd find out soon enough anyway," he replied. "Rachel Hillary's parents were killed over the holidays."

"Oh," Lily said. Her heart clenched. Rachel was in Ravenclaw, a lovely girl she shared a desk with in Transfiguration.

"The Dark Lord killed them, Lily. Because they were Mud... Muggle born."

"Lord Voldemort? But...but the Ministry has him under control!" Lily exclaimed. "He's just some nutter with a God complex. That's what they all say."

"So they'd have everyone believe. Look, just keep yourself safe, okay? Don't go wandering around after dark by yourself. Don't go doing anything stupid...."

Lily took offence at that. "I don't do stupid things, Severus! And besides, like Dumbledore would let Lord Voldemort just wander around the castle."

"You...you can't be too careful, Lil. He's out for... for Muggle-borns." He glanced back up the corridor. "You wanted something?"

"Huh?" Lily said, too lost in thought at what Severus had said. Lord Voldemort had killed Rachel's parents? Sure, she'd heard the rumours of the disappearances and murders before now, but not of anyone she knew. And they'd just been rumours. A sick feeling clenched at her gut. This was too real.

"You called me back here, I assume you wanted to tell me something?" Severus interrupted her thoughts, sounding a little impatient.

"Oh. Um. Yeah. Meet me in the library lunchtime tomorrow, we'll see if we can't find a cure for your mother's lovely hex."

Severus raised one sceptical brow, but nodded anyway. "Okay. Just don't hold your breath, Lily, I know what that woman is like. I suspect even she doesn't know how to reverse it."

"We can but try," Lily replied. She saw the last of the Gryffindors disappearing up the stairs. "I'd better go. See you tomorrow." She went to kiss him, then quickly pulled away as the memory of touching him on the train emanated painfully from her blistered fingers.

"Good night, Lily," Severus said down-heartedly. He swooped off up the corridor after the other Slytherins. Lily watched with a little trepidation as she saw him catch up with Mulciber and Avery, as they slapped him on the back and ushered him away.

Why did it all have to go wrong? Summer had been so wonderful, and now... now Lily didn't know what. But she had a terrible feeling, a sense of impending doom squirming like a serpent in her stomach, that things were only going to get worse. Much, much worse.

Try as they might, with so many hours spent in the library, even pleading with Madam Pomfrey (who, after concluding it only happened when Severus touched Lily, that it was indeed a very good deterrent-cum-contraceptive and perhaps she should ask Mrs Snape for it), nothing worked.

Lily did find one thing, though. "Once you turn seventeen, it'll wear off," she told Severus one day over yet another tumbling stack of books in the library. "Well, at least I think so. *Hexes for Heterosexuals* says that any spell held over a child by their parents will cease to be once the witch or wizard comes of age."

"They haven't met my mother," Severus replied dolefully.

"Well, we can only hope!" Lily said, trying to sound optimistic.

"Yeah."

"Good afternoon, Snivellus."

Lily's head jerked up to find Sirius and James standing over their table. James cocked his head, reading from the selection of books Severus had before him. "Love charms, hexes and cures. Merlin, Evans, do you know what he's done to you?" James' gaze bore into Lily.

"Severus has done nothing to me," Lily retorted, then cringed as she realised what she'd said.

Sirius and James burst into laughter. "Why does that not surprise me? I doubt Snivellus would know what to do with it anyway!"

Severus leapt to his feet, his wand out and directed right at the duo.

"I'd hate to think what sort of state yours is in, Black," Lily spat, glaring at him. "And as for Potter here, well, he has such an obvious way with the ladies, charmed me right off my feet. I suspect he's starting to cramp your style now."

"Now Evans, no need to be like that. I'm positive if you'd just spend two minutes alone with me, you'd realise I am more than talented in the"

"Bastard!" Severus yelled. "Don't you dare talk to her like that!"

"Afraid she's going to take me up on it, Snivelly? Won't be her loss, I assure you," James replied.

Lily gave him a disgusted look and began packing up her books.

"Sure, Evans. Better watch it, Snively, it's only a matter of time before she's mine," James said. Lily looked up and saw him turn to go, saw Severus' face, saw his wand arm move, his mouth form the beginnings of Sectumsempra.

"No!" she screamed, diving for his arm, knocking his wand off-direction. She heard the tear of paper, saw the sliced remains of an entire shelf of books flutter to the floor, but the sudden pain in her hands and her right leg distracted her completely. Falling to the ground, she tried to clutch at her leg, then screamed in pain as her hands touched her skin. Terrified, she turned her palms over. They were scorched red, blisters the size of marbles covering every centimetre that had touched Severus.

"Lily!" Severus cried, bending down over her. He reached out to help her, then quickly drew his hand away. Turning, he glared up at Potter and Black, both of whom stood there, frozen to the spot. "Help her!"

Potter moved first, bending down to look at Lily's hands as she whimpered in agony.

"Merlin," James muttered, sliding his arms under her and lifting her up to carry her from the library.

"What the hell did you do to her?!" James yelled over his shoulder at Severus. "You are going to pay for that, Snivellus."

Madam Pomfrey did manage to fix Lily's hands and leg, but it had taken over a week of agony before the blisters finally disappeared, leaving her hands red and raw. Not once did Severus visit Lily in the hospital wing. By the time Lily was allowed to leave, she was beside herself with worry once more.

It hadn't taken her long to find him, though. As she struggled with the key in the lock to their cave, her hands sorely protesting, she jumped slightly in surprise as the door was pulled open before her. Severus stood inside, looking at her and then away.

"Severus?" She spoke with uncertainty.

"We have to talk."

Her stomach clenched. That didn't sound good. "Okay," she said, entering the cave. He nodded at one of the pumpkin fizz boxes and she sat herself down.

"I can't see you any more."

Lily sat there, dumbstruck. Finally, she managed one word. "What?"

"I can't see you any more. Look at what it's doing to you!" he exclaimed, nodding at her hands she held gingerly in her lap.

"It was an accident..."

"An accident that could have been far worse."

"So, you're going to let them win? You're going to just leave me, let your mother have her way, let Potter have his way? That's not the Severus Snape I know. The Severus I know is brave and cunning, not a coward."

His eyes bore into hers in anger. "Don't call me a coward!"

She cringed, but was glad. It was the response she'd been hoping for. "Well then, don't go giving up just"

"Cowardly would be to keep doing this, to keep seeing you despite the fact that I can hurt you, have hurt you. Cowardly and selfish."

"Rubbish," Lily said, waving a dismissive hand at him. "Don't be silly, Severus."

"Silly? Silly?! I heard you screaming, Lily, saw you writhing in pain. You spent a week in the hospital!"

"And I'm fine!" she insisted. But he turned away. "Please, Severus, don't do this to me." Tears stung her eyes. Her voice faltered and failed.

He turned around, looked at her, then slumped down on one of the make-shift seats. "Then what am I supposed to do?" he pleaded.

"Be my friend."

"Do you have any idea, Lily, how hard it is to be in the same room as you, to see, to smell you, and not touch you? It's torture." He looked genuinely pained.

"And don't you think not talking to me at all wouldn't be worse? I couldn't bare it if you weren't my friend anymore, Severus. Truly, I couldn't."

He sighed, running his hands through his lank hair in frustration. "Okay. Fine. But anything else, you get hurt once more, and it has to be over."

Lily smiled. That compromise would suffice for now.

Weeks came and went, and although Severus was still around, Lily couldn't help but notice he was spending less time in her company. It wasn't that he didn't seem to like her anymore, but every time he looked at her she could see the pain and worry in his eyes. She didn't push the issue, he needed time to realise that she was right, that they were still friends, always would be.

But rumours began to flutter to her ears of what he was doing with his spare time spending more and more of it with those Slytherin boys, Mulciber and Avery. The last Lily had heard, Avery's father had been locked away in Azkaban for murdering a Muggle. Murder!

And the rumours of Voldemort's growing influence and power were often accompanied by mention of the Slytherins' names. She worried for Severus, worried what he was getting himself into.

But, he must know what he was doing. Severus was smart, Lily rationalised. He wouldn't do anything stupid.

Her conclusion was rattled though, when her sister came to her one day. She looked terrible, nasty looking pimples had broken out across her face, but when Lily took a good look at them, she was torn between feeling sorry for her sister and laughing out loud. The angry red eruptions distinctly formed the words 'I am Rose' across her forehead. Severus' jinx had worked.

"You've been pretending to be me again!" Lily exclaimed.

"I...I'm sorry, Lil. Really," she said miserably.

"Well, it serves you right!" Lily retorted, turning to leave.

"Wait!" Rose called, and something in her voice ground Lily to a halt. "There's something I have to tell you."

Lily turned, but didn't step any closer to her sister. "What?" she demanded.

And what Rose had to say devastated her.

She'd had no choice, she'd had to go to Dumbledore. The things Rose said Severus was planning on doing to James Potter.... Yes, she detested James, but by the sounds of things Severus had no qualms about hurting him. It was as if something inside Severus had cracked.

The plan, according to Rose, had been to get James up on the Astronomy Tower, and Severus had wanted her help persuading him there. And it had been Rose he'd told, thinking it was her. He could no longer tell them apart, and that said worlds to Lily.

She'd had to go to Dumbledore, of course, she had no choice, though it had taken her a while after her sister had told her of their plan, debating whether she should get Severus into trouble. But afterwards, she knew she'd done the right thing. Up there had been waiting half a dozen Slytherins armed with magic she didn't even dare to read about. And her sister had been caught up in it too.

And James... James had taken her tattling as a declaration of desire for him, following her around the school, pushing harder and harder for her to go out with him. The pained look she'd caught on Severus' face when he saw James sitting next to her out on the lawn one day haunted her.

And now it looked like she'd lost Severus for good. He hadn't spoken to her in over a week, had been skipping Potions and avoided making eye contact with her in the Great Hall. Finally, though, she'd caught up with him in the courtyard, not leaving up until he acknowledged her. And then she'd tried to explain to him, tried to make him understand why she'd had to go to Dumbledore, but he didn't seem to comprehend a word.

"You said you would, you said you would help!" he stammered angrily.

"You seriously think I'd agree to something like that?" Lily spat back at him. Severus looked at her, confused. Still, he didn't seem to realise he'd been talking to Rose. Lily was torn between anger and crying. He was no longer hers.

"I thought we were supposed to be friends?" Severus said to her as they walked across the courtyard. "Best friends?"

"We are, Sev," she said, but she wasn't sure she believed that anymore. She was friends but with the Severus of last summer, not this Dark creature who took pride in torturing her fellow Gryffindors. "But I don't like some of the people you're hanging around with!" She chose her words carefully, not wanting to accuse him of anything. "I'm sorry, but I detest Avery and Mulciber! Mulciber!" She paused for a moment, frustrated. Couldn't he see what he was becoming? "What do you see in him, Sev? He's creepy! D'you know what he tried to do to Mary Macdonald the other day?" Poor Mary was still recovering in the hospital wing, her mutilated arm under Madam Pomfrey's watchful gaze. And all because she'd refused to go to the top of the Astronomy tower with Mulciber one evening.

Lily leaned against a pillar, tired from it all. Tired of fighting against James and Sirius, tired of getting into trouble over things her sister did. And tired of having to constantly calm Severus down, hoping he'd see reason and stop all this nonsense. She looked at Severus' thin, sallow face, and wondered what had happened to the boy she'd met five years ago. Wondered what had happened to the young man she'd spent her summer with.

"That was nothing," Severus said, dismissing her concern. "It was a laugh, that's all"

Lily was furious. And scared scared that he thought getting an innocent girl sent to the hospital wing was a joke. "It was Dark Magic, and if you think that's funny"

"What about the stuff Potter and his mates get up to?" demanded Severus. His face contorted in fury, and Lily could see him struggling to contain his resentment.

"What's Potter got to do with anything?" she demanded in turn. But with Severus, everything seemed to come back to James. He was obsessed with him that it was scaring her.

"They sneak out at night. There's something weird about that Lupin. Where does he keep going?"

Confused, Lily found herself repeating to him what she'd been told. "He's ill. They say he's ill"

"Every month at the full moon," Severus said sceptically.

"I know your theory," Lily said coldly. "Why are you so obsessed with them anyway? Why do you care what they're doing at night?"

"I'm just trying to show you they're not as wonderful as everyone seems to think they are." He stared at her, making her blush. She knew he was referring to the day he'd seen her speaking to James on the lawn. It was ridiculous really, she didn't like him. She wouldn't ever like him. And she'd made that abundantly clear to him, time after time.

"They don't use Dark Magic, though." She hushed her voice, aware of all the other students having stopped to stare. "And you're being really ungrateful. I heard what happened the other night. You went sneaking down that tunnel by the Whomping Willow and James Potter saved you from whatever's down there"

Severus' face contorted so Lily no longer recognised him. "Saved? Saved? You think he was playing hero? He was saving his neck and his friends' too! You're not going to I won't let you!"

Lily was furious. How dare he start making demands on what she could and couldn't do and whom she could and couldn't speak to while he was hanging out with those horrid Slytherins, not listening to a word of her warnings. "Let me? Let me?" she squeaked, her anger taking her voice.

She saw him squirm, realising his error.

"I didn't mean I just don't want to see you made a fool of he fancies you, James Potter fancies you!" Severus seemed pained at this admission, like the words were being wrenched from him against his will. "And he's not... Everyone thinks... Big Quidditch hero"

Lily could have felt pity for him, his fury leaving him incoherent, but she still fumed over his daring to tell her what to do.

"I know James Potter is an arrogant toerag," she said, silencing his outburst. "I don't need you to tell me that. But Mulciber and Avery's idea of humour is just evil. Evil, Sev. I don't understand how you can be friends with them."

Lily looked at him, her anger sliding for a moment as she saw Severus calm, his body relaxing, even the flicker of a smile on his face. She stood there, almost expecting an apology.

"Lily, come on, we're going to be late!" one of her friends called from across the courtyard.

Lily pulled herself upright from the pillar. "Just you think about what I said!" Lily snapped at him, as she hurried off to her next class.

AN: Big hugs to my stunning beta for her whirlwind performance on this one (and on it)

Legal stuff: Parts of this chapter contain quoted material from Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows - no copyright infringement intended, just having some fun!

Chapter Eight

Chapter 8 of 18

COMPLETE! Hermione knows his secrets, his destiny unfulfilled. Snape sees only desolate dark. But in the tale of love and longing, Lily remembers everything.

All is not as it seems. The world of wizards is full of lies and half-truths.

Over twenty years ago, Severus Snape fell in love with Lily Evans, and he never stopped loving her. His every move, his every thought, is purely for her. And he has only one place, a room, hidden deep under the lake, where he can relax, not worry about whom he is spying on, what he should be saying and doing, where his loyalties lie. Somewhere he can reminisce about his childhood days there with Lily, to allow himself space to grieve.

That though, as with everything else, is about to change.

Lily tentatively held out a small, wrapped gift.

"Happy birthday."

She hadn't spoken to Severus since before the Christmas holidays. On the Express she'd tried to track him down, only to find him in a carriage surrounded by Slytherins. She'd quickly turned away before any of them had seen her, but the sight had left a sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach. And now... now she worried what his reaction would be to seeing her, if he'd still even want to see her.

But she'd found him in their cave, so he couldn't have been avoiding her, at least not in private. Publicly he seemed almost embarrassed by her.

Severus quickly shut the book he'd been reading, stashed it under the pile on the pumpkin fizz box, and looked up at her. "You didn't need to do that," he said, nodding at the gift.

"Why not? Seventeen... you're of age now, Severus. Big day."

Severus looked at her, his eyes raking her body. "Yes, of age..."

And she knew what he was thinking, wondering if his mother's jinx had worn off yet. She hoped it had. At least, she thought she hoped it had something had shifted between them. But maybe, just maybe if he could touch her again he'd spend more time with her, come back to her and leave behind his gang of Slytherins.

"Should we?" he asked quietly, placing his gift, unopened, on the box beside him.

Biting her bottom lip, she fiddled nervously with her hair.

"You have to promise me," she finally said, "that if it hasn't worked, that you're not going to leave me."

Severus looked at her. "I don't want to hurt you, Lil. It's the last thing I want to do."

She wanted to scream *"Then why keep hanging around with Avery, Mulciber, and those other creepy Slytherin boys!"* but she didn't. It hadn't worked last time, why would it this time?

"Promise me," she said again.

Severus closed his eyes for a moment, inhaling deeply. "Okay. I promise."

Lily reached out for him. Her hand hovered just above his, where a frayed cotton cuff met the pale skin of his wrist. This could well be it, she thought, the turning point. She could have him back, all of him. Drawing a breath for courage, she gently placed her fingers on his forearm.

The searing pain was instant. She clamped her hand down over his arm, hoping that if she held on long enough it would all end.

He yanked his arm away. "Lily, no!"

She collapsed back on her box, tears of frustration spilling down her cheeks. "It didn't work," she said dumbly.

"Obviously," Severus replied bitterly.

Other than in Potions, where it was all cordial business, it wasn't until three weeks later, Lily's birthday, that she had a chance to talk to him again. In fact, by seven that evening, she wondered if he was even going to stop by and wish her well. But the owl arrived, asking her to meet him down in their cave, and so she slipped out of the common room and down to the dungeons.

Severus greeted her, but his voice was distant.

"Hey," Lily replied, watching him carefully.

"Well, happy birthday." As if it hurt him to do so, he held out a gift to her. Lily held back, not moving until he shook the package at her. It reminded her of visits by distant relatives, bringing her gifts out of duty, not desire.

Watching his face, she reached out to take the parcel. His eyes suddenly widened in surprise, and it took Lily a moment to realise why, until she felt his skin beneath her finger. She'd touched him, her thumb against the top of his finger. And it didn't hurt. Far from it, it sent shivers of need through her body.

Slowly his other hand came up, hovered by her cheek, then as he drew a shuddering breath, he brushed her skin. Again, no pain, nothing by the warmth of his skin on

hers.

Lily pressed her face against his palm, closing her eyes as his thumb stroked her cheekbone.

"Lily." It was a hushed whisper, but it conveyed so much. His voice betrayed his longing, his sorrow, his desire. They stood that way for a while, Lily simply enjoying his touch.

She opened her eyes to check if he was real, and, met by dark longing, she knew it was.

His hand left hers, lifting her chin, tilting her head back. Slowly his lips came down over hers, softly at first, in an almost chaste kiss, barely touching her. Then, when nothing but desire flooded through her, Lily parted her mouth, inviting him in. He took her breath away, kissing her intensely. She fought with him, their tongues battling until she let out a gasp. He broke away from her mouth to nuzzle at her neck, shivering as he inhaled deeply against her skin.

"Oh, Lily. I've missed you."

She tried to reply, but her voice was gone. Instead, she placed her hands on his back, pulling at him, pressing herself to him. The present fell to the floor with a dull thud, but it went unnoticed. His musky scent filled her sinuses, filled her mind, as he kissed his way along her neck, over her exposed collar bone. She shivered, pressing herself tighter against him, never wanting to let go.

"Please, Lily, let me," he gasped, undoing the top button of her shirt. "Let me make love to you." His words wrenched through her, breaking down what little was left of her barriers. "It will be sweet and gentle and everything you deserve," he begged against her skin.

She wanted to. She wanted him as hers again. She wanted him.

"Yes," she breathed.

Severus paused for a moment, as if he'd expected her to say no.

He undid the next button. "You won't regret it, Lil."

His mouth moved over her skin, kissing each new part that he exposed as he divested her of her shirt. It fluttered to the floor to join the present, pushed off of her arms along with her robes, unnoticed. He took his time, exploring everywhere, kissing up her arms, over her stomach, stroking her back with his fingers. And she let him, arching her head back in pleasure at his touch.

He unzipped her skirt, letting it slide down her legs and to the floor, then stood back, his hand holding hers, and looked at her. Lily squirmed a little under his scrutinising gaze as he racked her body from head to toe with his eyes, but as desired filled his face, she relaxed, and as he reached out to touch her again, stroking her sides, the longing hit her deep inside.

Lily slid his robes off of his shoulders, and they fell away, pooling on the floor quickly forgotten. His shirt she tugged from his trousers as he continued to touch her, explore her body.

Determinedly, she stripped him of his shirt, pushing it from his shoulders and down his arms, revelling in the firm flesh beneath her hands, but the exploratory journey of her fingers down his smooth, hard skin was interrupted by coarse cotton fabric. His forearm was heavily bandaged.

Lily looked up at him, concerned.

He shrugged. "It's healing up nicely."

"What happened?" she asked, not quite put at ease by his words.

"That doesn't matter right now," he replied, and he kissed her again, removing all other thoughts from her mind.

Her fingers fluttered over his chest. The coarse hair tickled her fingers, the firm muscles made her ache for him. She took in the contours of his upper body, searching out the curves and dips, trailing her fingers over his ribs, wondering at the shudder that overtook him as she traced along the fine trail of hair beneath his naval.

He explored her at arms length, allowing her space to touch his body, but the chill of the room began to seep into her skin, fighting a battle with the warmth emanating from within her and from him.

He let her go, and she sighed at her loss as she watched him walk across the room and remove the lid from the pickling jar that still held her blue flame. Immediately the room warmed. He bent and picked up his sodden robes from the wet floor, retrieving his wand. With a quiet spell, in a voice that reverberated through her, she watched as he transfigured one pumpkin fizz box into a bed. He extended a hand to her and gently pulled her down beside him onto the soft covers.

Quickly, he undid his boots, toeing them off to hit the floor with a splash, then took her ankles in his hands, unclasped her shoes and dropped them as well. He lay down beside her, the bed dipping slightly under his weight. He stroked her skin, his hands sliding around to unclasp her bra, fumbling for a few moments before pulling it loose. Down her arms it slipped, to join the rest of their clothes littering the puddles on the floor.

He worshipped her body, bathing it in kisses, nips, licks and gentle strokes, everywhere from her face down to her ankles, before moving back to her mouth. Lily moaned quietly, her body fizzing with desire from his ministrations, as he kissed her again, harder than last time, but not harshly. His fingers trailed down her chest, stroking her breasts, cupping them gently, massaging them firmly. And as his fingers caught up her nipples, she let out a needy groan. This was right, this was so right.

"Oh, Lily," Severus murmured, kissing his way down her neck, down to her breasts. His mouth was hot against her skin, almost scorching, but in a wonderful way. She felt the surreptitious movement of his hand down her stomach, floating over her abdomen, making her hips rise from the bed to meet his touch. And touch her he did. His fingers feather-light over her knickers at first, becoming firmer and firmer until Lily felt the material grow wet against her skin.

With determination, she moved to relieve Severus of his trousers, fumbling with his belt until it came loose. Lightly she began undoing the buttons that held his fly closed, fingertips brushing over the hardness beneath his clothing. He raised his hips, momentarily breaking his touch of her as she slid his trousers down over his hips, his thighs, his knees until finally they were off.

She sat there, perched on the edge of the bed, admiring his body. His skin was pale, covered in a fine layer of coarse dark hair. His chest she'd already explored, but she couldn't help admiring it again. Firm and lined with muscles beneath the skin, this Adonis, this picture of masculinity, sent the butterflies in her stomach frantic with desire. Further down, she skipped over his hips, not wanting to be caught staring at his black underwear for too long, down his thighs, to his shins, his ankles. He was definitely a sight for needy eyes.

She looked up at him, and he reached out to her, a small chuckle in his throat as he pulled her down beside him again. It was the first time she'd heard him laugh in months.

He took up residence at her breasts once more, his mouth a little firmer this time, tugging slightly on her nipples, tugging at something wonderful inside of her.

His fingers returned to her knickers, part of her now desperate for him to take them off and touch her properly, part of her still too shy.

Shy be damned, she thought, I want this.

She stroked his body, back down to his stomach, then more slowly, tentatively, down the trail of hair above his underwear again.

"Please, Lily," he murmured around her breast.

Slowly, her fingers moved over the cotton, coming to a halt of a tiny damp patch where her fingers first met hard, hot flesh beneath the material. He moaned softly, and, emboldened by his reaction, she traced his torrid length.

Her insides contracted at the feel of him, at the thrill of knowing that soon he'd be inside her, at the anticipation and the unknown.

A low growl came from his throat, and, a little hastily, he tugged the fabric of her underwear aside and slid his fingers along her moist folds. She gasped at his touch, her fingers falling away from him.

"Sorry," he murmured, his lips on her neck.

"Don't apologise, Severus. You're always apologising, there's no need," she whispered, the words coming out on the cusp of her shallow breaths.

She saw his chest rise as he drew a deep breath, then slowly she felt his fingers begin to move across and between a place unexplored. She shuddered as his fingertips ran gently up her, wondering at the silken feeling as they slid easily over her moist skin, but the wonder ceased to be replaced by ecstasy as the pad of his finger brushed over the hard tip of her clitoris. Her hips bucked, pressing up against him.

"Oh, Lil."

His voice was magic to her ears. Again he stroked her, slowly, determinedly, the concentration furrowing his brow. Slowly, as she became used to his touch, her mind returned, allowing her to lock the delicious feeling in there, allowing her to move again. Her hand dragged down his belly, this time delving inside his underwear. Coarse hair tickled her skin at first, but then she met hard flesh. The silken feeling of the head of his penis surprised her; she hadn't expected the skin to be so soft, so smooth. His fingers stalled a moment, but this time he didn't rush, simply waited for a while as she slid her hand down a little, wrapping her fingers around him. The size of him scared her a little; sure, he wasn't as well hung as the men in that magazine Mary had stolen from her mother had been, but now that he was here, he was real, Lily worried a little about how much this was going to hurt.

But no, so far, nothing hurt. Nothing but the ache inside of her to have him.

She must have lingered too long, or at least too long for Severus. He wrapped his hand around hers, slowly sliding her fingers up and down. He groaned at the first movement, thrusting into her hand.

She saw him bite his bottom lip almost painfully. "On second thoughts," he said, uncurling her fingers and pulling them from him, "perhaps not". He moved over her, pinning her to the bed beneath him with his forearms on her shoulders. And he kissed her again, softly. Lily felt him holding back, and wondered if he felt the same as her: terrified and exhilarated all at once.

He lowered his body down, the first time since they'd undressed that they had come into full contact, the only thing separating them was the flimsy cotton of their underwear.

She marvelled at the touch of his chest against hers, pressing her into the mattress. She arched against his flat stomach, and as his hips met hers she couldn't help but grind against him.

He met her thrust for thrust as their tongues tangled, as his fingers massaged her scalp. Her own hands pulled desperately at his back, slick with perspiration, pulling him more tightly against her.

She was drowning in that wonderful abyss again.

Finally, he broke their kiss.

He moved down her, and she cried out at the loss of his body against hers, but as he reached her hips, his fingers pulled at the waist band of her knickers on her hips, sliding them down and off.

Flushing, Lily locked her legs together, suddenly all too aware of how naked she was before him. He looked at her and smiled, his hands running up the insides of her legs, over her knees, up her inner thighs, gently persuading her to part them. She resisted at first, but as she watched him, saw the desire, the love in his eyes, she relaxed, allowing her legs to fall apart. Gently he pushed until she parted completely before him, exposing all of herself to him.

His eyes left hers, racking down her body until he was staring at her curls. Lily squirmed at his intensity. With an experimental touch, he reached out and dragged his fingers through her curls. Then again, this time deeper, he touched though the hairs to her skin. She shivered and he looked her in the eyes again, and knew what he saw there, the same as she saw in his; raw need.

He looked down again, and Lily's eyes slipped shut as she felt him press one finger inside of her, felt herself slick against his skin. Gently he slid his hand from her, then back in again.

"So hot, Lil," he muttered, and forcing her eyes open for a moment she caught a wonderful sight; his eyes were heavily lidded, his body arched a little, and his mouth slightly open. Desire embodied. It burned into her memory.

Gently a second finger joined the first and Lily could keep her eyes open no longer. He stroked her, building up momentum. It didn't hurt; it was a slightly odd feeling at first, foreign, but as his movements grew stronger the sense of strangeness left and only desire remained. Her toes began to tingle, her muscles clenched down on his with each movement.

Her eyes fluttered open only briefly, catching him watching her intensely. As they shut again, she felt pressure against her clitoris. His thumb, she concluded, but only just managed that thought. The feelings were overwhelming her, as her body clamped down desperately around his fingers.

"Oh, oh!" she cried out. "I think...Severus, I think...I'm going to...Severus..." she chanted.

His fingers pulled from her quickly, and she opened her eyes wide in surprise, only just having time to see him ridding himself of his underwear before he was atop of her again, this time his bare penis against her own naked sex. He thrust against her, his arousal sliding through her folds, keeping her at the point of almost ecstasy, but never quite enough to push her over.

"Lily?"

"Yes, Severus. Please, yes."

He groaned. Fumbling, he tried to find her opening. She felt him raise his hips higher, felt his hand between them, obviously gripping himself. He slid around her wet heat, driving her to near-madness. She placed her hand over his own, guiding him until he was poised at her entrance.

"Merlin, I love you Lily. I always will. For eternity."

She tried to echo his words, but she could do nothing but mouth her love back to him, her voice gone. He smiled gently at her.

He pressed forward slowly. Lily shuddered at the feel of him, so silky inside of her. There was but little pain, more discomfort at the unknown as her body became used to him. He seemed to keep going forever, until finally she felt the tip of his penis bump against something deep within her.

"Oh my..." Severus moaned in her hair. "Oh, Lily."

She felt it, felt the quivering of her inner walls, the light-headedness, and knew she was so close to climaxing. Never had she managed to bring herself here before, but this sudden darkness that was taking over her vision, the light-headedness, could be nothing else.

"Severus, please. Please!" she begged.

And he pulled back from her slightly, then pressed back in. She whimpered.

He lost control. His hips pulled back then shoved back inside of her with abandon. Stars fluttered behind Lily's eyelids as her orgasm, her first orgasm, took her over, her muscles contracting around his flailing shaft, her fingernails digging into his back.

"Damn!" he cried out, then as he thrust deeply into her, his control completely gone, her name rang out from his lips, "Lily!"

And she felt warm spasms of fluid filling her as he climaxed, his breath escaping in guttural grunts, his dark eyes wild.

He collapsed on top of her in a sweaty heap, her insides still quivering occasionally around him. She stroked his hair as he buried his head in her shoulder.

"I'm sorry," he muttered, and she could hear the embarrassment in his voice.

"I thought I told you not to apologise to me?" Lily said, berating him light-heartedly.

He pulled his face up to look at her with great effort. "Did you...?" He left the words hanging there.

"Yes," she said with a grin on her face. "Yes, I most certainly did."

The relief on his face was astonishing. He propped himself up on his elbows and kissed her gently. "Thank you, Lily."

"Thank" She reached up to stroke his arms as she went to return his words. But her reply cut off as felt the raised marks on his forearm. A chill ran through her body. Turning her head, her heart wrenching, she tried to reel from him in horror, but he still had her pinned to the bed, he was still inside of her. She closed her eyes, willing it to go away, but when she opened them, it was still there. The bandage on his left arm had come loose, and there, in stark reality contrasted against the pale skin of his arm, was another tattoo. A black one, slithering magically. A skull with a horrid serpentine tongue. The same mark pictured in the Daily Prophet hanging above the houses of those killed by Lord Voldemort.

The Dark Mark.

She tore her vision from it and met his eyes with horror. She stared at him, dumbstruck.

And then she slapped him. "How dare you? How dare you?!" Her voice sounded hysterical even to her ears, but she didn't care. She couldn't believe he would do that, that he would join the Death Eaters. She shoved at him, pushing him from her. Leaping off the bed as if it were on fire, she yanked up her sodden robes from the floor, clutching them to herself, trying to cover up as she desperately searched the pockets for her wand. She saw Severus wince, but she had no intention of hurting him. She just wanted out of here, as far away from him as possible. It had all been a farce; he was Voldemort's man, not hers. She felt dirty, violated, lied to. And, most of all, defeated.

"Let me explain!" Severus pleaded as he watched her spell her clothes back on, not even bothering to dry them.

"There is nothing to explain, Severus," Lily said coldly. "It's over." And she slammed the cave door shut behind her.

AN: Thanks to my lovely beta once more, I couldn't have done it without her :D

Chapter Nine

Chapter 9 of 18

COMPLETE! Hermione knows his secrets, his destiny unfulfilled. Snape sees only desolate dark. But in the tale of love and longing, Lily remembers everything.

All is not as it seems. The world of wizards is full of lies and half-truths.

Over twenty years ago, Severus Snape fell in love with Lily Evans, and he never stopped loving her. His every move, his every thought, is purely for her. And he has only one place, a room, hidden deep under the lake, where he can relax, not worry about whom he is spying on, what he should be saying and doing, where his loyalties lie. Somewhere he can reminisce about his childhood days there with Lily, to allow himself space to grieve.

That though, as with everything else, is about to change.

Chapter Nine

Mary Macdonald dropped the *Daily Prophet* before Lily on the Gryffindor table, startling her. She'd been lost in thought, deeply disgusted at herself for what she'd done the night before. Her mother was right, she should have been more careful as to who she gave her virginity away to, she was certainly regretting what happened with Severus now. The thing was, it had been wonderful, everything she'd imagined, but the Mark on Severus' arm, it had destroyed everything. And made her feel so very ill. Untouched toast lay buried, butter-side-up, beneath the folds of the newspaper.

Lily looked up at her friend, confused, only to be met by Mary's look of terror.

"Spinner's End. Isn't that where your family live?" the girl asked, her voice wavering, struggling to hold back emotion. Her eyes pleaded for Lily's answer to be 'no'.

Lily's brow furrowed in confusion as she looked back at the newspaper lying across her breakfast, an oily butter stain seeping through the crossword.

And there, on the front page, was a sight that would have made her lose all in her stomach if she had had anything in there. The Dark Mark, glowing and twisting above an all too familiar neighbourhood.

Terrified, she lifted the paper up, scrutinising exactly where the Dark Mark hovered.

With relief, she realised it wasn't her house.

Then, with unease, she looked again.

It was a run down two-story brick house, the paint peeling from the front door. Almost identical to every other on her street, but this one was familiar. She could almost imagine the horrid witch standing in the door. It was the Snape house.

With her heart thumping so loudly in her ears she could barely concentrate on the words, she read the article.

At six o'clock last night, a band of Death Eaters descended upon a small house in Spinner's End, killing both occupants. Mrs Eileen Snape, formally Eileen Prince, 36, Captain of the Hogwarts Gobstones Team in 1958, was found slumped in her front door, the body of her Muggle husband, Tobias Snape, 52, lay in the living room. The Aurors are yet to make any arrests.

Lily glanced over at the Slytherin table, but Severus wasn't there.

Her stomach churned.

"Excuse me," she muttered, leaping from the table and ran to the nearest bathroom.

Sitting on the cold tile floor, worshipping the porcelain god, realisation suddenly hit her.

The only reason Severus... no, not Severus, *Snape*, he was no longer *her* Severus... had been able to touch her last night was because his mother had been killed.

She tried not to think it, tried to shove the thought away, but it raised its ugly head all the same. Had Severus had her disposed of?

Lily bent over the bowl and retched again.

Seventh year started, and Lily was more pained than ever. Snape if anything, had turned even further to the Dark over the holidays. She could see it in his eyes the one time she'd turned and walked straight into him outside of Potions. No longer were they glinting black depths filled with passion, they were cold and empty, completely empty.

"Lily," he said, reaching out for her for just a moment before she heard the snickering of the heinous band of Slytherin seventh years behind him.

"Forget her, Snape, she's just a Mudblood."

His hand pulled back sharply.

"Don't you ever touch me again!" Lily yelled, shoving past him and rushing off down the corridor. She couldn't bear it, couldn't bear seeing him; he was like a ghost from her past, he looked like the Severus she loved, even his aroma was *his*, but he was just a shallow impression of that boy she used to love; once loved. Loved since she was ten years old, before she knew what love was. Of the boy she loved still.

She bravely swiped away the traitorous tear that crept into the corner of her eye, defiantly pushing out her chin.

She had been made Head Girl alongside Hogwarts new Head Boy, James Potter, who evidently had no qualms about making his feelings for her heard again.

Head Girls didn't cry in the corridors.

As the months wore on, Lily finally accepted that there would be no future for her and Severus, for the Severus she loved no longer existed.

Lily found herself conceding to James Potter's wishes. She didn't hate him any longer, not after she heard again the story from him, how he'd saved Severus from the dangers in the Shrieking Shack, but she couldn't really say she loved him either. More, she tolerated him for the sake of her position as Head Girl. He was smart, Head Boy, and an almost legendary Seeker. As Mary Macdonald pointed out to her, what more could she want? She did have to admit, if you could get past the arrogance, he wasn't such a bad guy. He was mostly harmless, and certainly led astray by Sirius. Alone he was tolerable, possibly even likeable. Eventually she gave in to him, accepting his offer to take her to dinner in Diagon Alley during the Christmas break.

The end of their final year came, and Lily found herself sitting her room, sombrely packing her trunk for the very last time. She'd upended the lot, tipped it over the floor. And, when she'd caught sight of something shiny jammed in the corner of the otherwise empty trunk, she'd reached inside. When her fingers met cool metal, she pulled up the object with surprise. It was the key. She'd almost forgotten about it, tucked away in her trunk as it had been since that night she'd made love with Severus. No, not Severus, *Snape*, she reminded herself.

And she found herself crying, weeping, as she remembered when Severus had given it to her. She remembered him kissing her, wondered what that would be like now or at least in an alternate now, one where he wasn't caught up in all the Death Eater nonsense, one where she wasn't going out with James Potter.

She was tempted to go and give the key back to him, but frankly, she didn't think she could stand the idea of seeing him right now. Every time they passed in the corridors, caught a glimpse of each other over breakfast in the Great Hall, Lily felt as though she'd been stabbed through the heart. Perhaps, she thought, if she just avoided him she could pretend he didn't exist and lift this emotionally draining shadow that seemed to be engulfing her.

But, despite the bellowing voice of reason and the dictate of common sense, she couldn't just throw the key away. Sighing, she knew what she had to do. She picked it up and made her way down to the cave.

The last time she'd been down here she'd been naked, writhing with Severus *Snape* no, it was definitely Severus then on the transfigured bed, him taking her to ecstasy-filled heights, promising to love her for eternity.

Eternity appeared to be a very short time.

But still, it wasn't as if she could just shove all her feelings for him away; deep down she was terrified for him, for what Lord Voldemort might do to him. And if that were the case, he'd need more protection than she did, and with the charms on the keys, maybe with both he'd be safe. She didn't stop to think about why she still cared, that she shouldn't care about his wellbeing. She didn't want to.

She lay the silver necklace down on the upended pumpkin fizz carton that had been his, and with one warm tear rolling down her cheek, she turned and left.

And it all went from there. Before she knew it, school was over, the war was waging and James Potter had proposed. And she'd said yes. In wartime, you did what you could, hung on to those you could, and though James certainly wasn't the love of her life, he wasn't bad either. He was fighting for the right side, his heart was in the right place it was more than she could say of Sev... Snape. Out of school James seemed have bloomed, became a man unto himself, no longer the silly little boy who messed up his own hair to look cool.

And yet she knew, they both knew, had it not been a time of war, neither of them would have married the other. It didn't matter, though, they each needed someone. And their friends and family seemed to need them. They looked on the Potters with hope, like they alone carried the promise of better times.

As the months drew on, married life became very routine. They moved into the house his parents had left him in the village of Godric's Hollow. To the outside world, everything was perfect, but behind the façade things were quite different. James became increasingly frustrated she'd known at school his hopes had been to join a professional Quidditch team, but with the war on, that wasn't an option. They did their own thing, hung out with their own friends, sharing a bed at night out of habit and occasionally seeking each other's comfort. At least, Lily felt the sex was only for comfort, to remind each other, as each passing day more and more friends were killed, that there was another human on the planet that cared for them.

But again, it was all to change. Lily came home early one day from an assignment the Order had sent her on. It turned out Mundungus, as per usual, had heard wrong. It wasn't Death Eaters congregating at the Leaky Cauldron, it was a Deaf Beaters convention. Lily was happy, and light hearted as she made her way home, glad for once it wasn't some nasty activity of the wizarding world's underbelly.

So she'd gone home, a little relieved for some time to relax. She'd opened the door, and walked down the hall at Godric's Hollow, hung her cloak on the hook and headed for the kitchen. Heated voices ground her to a halt outside the door.

"How could you be so stupid?" James' voice was echoing through the house. He sounded absolutely furious.

"Stupid? Who says this is my fault? Merlin, Potter, it takes two to...."

It was Rose.

Lily barely had time to conceive this as being particularly odd, considering she hadn't seen Rose since the last day of Hogwarts, before her voice floated into the hall again. "I'm not the one who's married."

"I thought the plan was to convince Lily the baby was hers," James said, and as Lily stood in the hall, listening, she could almost see him shaking his head. Baby?

"Why? Why can't we just tell her?"

"Why? Because you are *Rose Evans* nobody likes you, nobody respects you"

Rose answered, but Lily could hear the hurt in her voice. "I think we should just tell her, get it out in the open. Lily's so smart. She'll know what to do to keep Voldemort away"

"Yeah, if she doesn't hex us both to oblivion first. Ever think of that, Rosie?"

Lily's heart sunk. James had betrayed her, and with her sister of all people. Worse still, instead of showing Gryffindor courage, he was trying to cover it all up. At her expense.

"Yes," Rose replied, but for once she didn't sound spiteful. She sounded pained.

But it was nothing to the pain inside Lily. She could feel her insides being torn apart. No, James Potter was not her great love, but she had learned to love him all the same, and here he was, off getting another woman pregnant. No, not another woman, her twin sister, of all people. Her disowned twin sister.

"No one can know about this!" James yelled, his voice so loud it hurt her ears. "It would never work. You have that thing, that Mark on your arm. Voldemort owns you."

"He doesn't own me!" Rose bellowed. "I don't have to be on his side, I don't have to be on anyone's side. I could come join you. We could run away from it all...." She was pleading with him, begging him.

"You'd better bloody run away, Rose Evans!" Lily yelled, storming into the kitchen, unable to tolerate another word of their scheming. She didn't know who she was angrier with her deceitful sister or her cheating husband.

"Lily...Lily..." James spluttered.

"I will deal with you later," Lily hissed at him, whirling around on her sister. "Get out!"

"Lily, I didn't mean..."

"You don't ever mean anything, do you Rose? Now, get out of my house and away from my husband. And don't ever come back!"

Rose gave James a desperate look, but when he shrugged his shoulders at her, she left, her head hanging in defeat.

"She tricked me, Lil," James began, looking at her with his big eyes.

"She tricked you? You're telling me after all these years you can't tell me apart from...from her?"

"It was dark and..."

But he was speaking to her back. Lily had turned, grabbed her cloak back off the stand and headed for the door. "I don't want to hear it!" she yelled back at him.

"Lily, please. Come back, let's talk it over! What will people think?" He'd looked absolutely pathetic standing there, begging her to stay, running his hand through his messy black hair, and his reasoning almost made her physically sick.

"I don't give a damn what people think!"

And she left.

She hadn't gone back, instead she'd gone to stay with Mary. Though they'd drifted apart over the last few years, her friend had given her a bed, and opened her house to her. But Lily hadn't opened up to her in return; she didn't know why she'd told Mary that James was away and with the war on she just didn't feel safe. And daily, almost hourly, owls would arrive from James, continuing to insist he hadn't known it was Rose that night. Deep down she knew he was lying, but a little part of her had nagging doubts. The part that wanted to pretend to the world that everything was okay in the supposedly sacred marriage of Lily and James Potter. Everyone looked upon them as saints. So far from the truth it was laughable, apparently.

Finally, Lily could take the doubt no longer. She did something she never thought she'd do again, and perhaps against her better judgement, but of late her judgement had been somewhat impaired. She contacted Severus Snape.

When she met him, down a dark walkway in Knockturn Alley, she could hardly believe the man she was looking at was Severus. He was gaunter than ever, his dark eyes so distant she could no longer see into them. Compared to the boy she'd met all those years ago, he was an empty shell.

"Lily," he spoke her name quietly as she approached him.

"Do you have what I asked for?" she enquired, not stopping to say hello.

He had reached out to touch her cheek, but he had halted mid-air at her crisp tone, his hand falling limply to his side.

"I do." He paused, watching her. "What intrigues me, though, is what you need it for."

"Not to use against your precious leader, if that's what you mean," Lily replied sharply. She was so filled with hatred for him, but at the same time felt like breaking down and crying in his arms. No, not *his* arms, twelve-year-old Severus' arms. Life had been so much simpler then.

"Although that does offer comfort, that is not what I meant."

"Yeah, wouldn't want your dear Lord Voldemort spilling all his secrets, Merlin knows what he's got on you, hey, Sev?" she snapped, and shuddered at the thought, at the things he might have done.

"Lily," he said her name, sounding pained. "That's not what I meant. I meant, it would be foolish to try to go after him armed only with Veritaserum."

"I hardly think you're in a position to tell me what would be foolish, Severus Snape."

His mouth set in a firm line. "So, what do you want it for?"

"It's personal," she said evasively.

He looked at her, and she couldn't read his face. "That wouldn't have stopped you a few years ago."

She sighed. "That was then."

There was an awkward pause. "Potter... he's not mistreating you?" his voice was toneless, hollow, but just for a moment Lily thought she saw something flicker across his face, a fleeting emotion.

She wasn't about to tell him, tell him her cheating husband had knocked up her sister. Not him, of all people. She lied. "He's a perfect gentleman."

"He had better be," Severus snapped.

Just for a moment, Lily felt herself fall apart inside, felt her lip bottom lip quiver.

And he reached out and touched her, brushed her cheek. And she didn't pull away. She hated to admit it, but his contact made her feel better, if only for a moment. Before she knew what was happening, he was kissing her, his lips seeking hers, his mouth demanding. A flutter of the past filled her, a deep, longing, needy ache that consumed her, inside and out.

But visions of the Mark on his arm, of her sister and James together flashed through her mind, offering reason to her desperate mind. No, she wasn't going to be like cheating James, she was better than that! She hastily pulled back.

He sighed, defeated. He reached into his pocket and drew out a small vial. He studied it for a moment before handing it over.

His fingers brushed hers as she took it, his hand lingering for a moment. Lily didn't rush to snap her hand back. Just for a moment she allowed herself to wonder what life would have been like if she'd ignored Snape's move to Voldemort's side and stuck with him. But she knew that hadn't been an option. She could never have lived knowing he was part of all the terror Voldemort was inflicting on people, innocent people. What had compelled him to do that? Why had he joined Voldemort? Things could have been so different!

Finally, she drew her hand away.

He broke eye contact, turned away. "Take care, Lily," he said. And then he was gone, lost to the shadows.

AN: Thanks to my wonderful beta and her razor-sharp whip look out, hun, I'm pulling mine out next!

Chapter Ten

Chapter 10 of 18

COMPLETE! Hermione knows his secrets, his destiny unfulfilled. Snape sees only desolate dark. But in the tale of love and longing, Lily remembers everything.

All is not as it seems. The world of wizards is full of lies and half-truths.

Over twenty years ago, Severus Snape fell in love with Lily Evans, and he never stopped loving her. His every move, his every thought, is purely for her. And he has only one place, a room, hidden deep under the lake, where he can relax, not worry about whom he is spying on, what he should be saying and doing, where his loyalties lie. Somewhere he can reminisce about his childhood days there with Lily, to allow himself space to grieve.

That though, as with everything else, is about to change.

It didn't take Lily long to track Rose down. She was back at their desolate childhood house.

It had been a year now since Lily's parents had died, and the bitterness of their execution being called a 'freak tornado' by the Muggles and half the wizarding community still hadn't left her. More so, she knew it was her own fault. She hadn't taken enough precautions in hiding them. She should have known, what with her being in the Order, that they would be targets. That's when the war became personal, nothing else mattered, and she devoted all her energy to trying to win a painful war of magical attrition.

Rose was sitting on the floor of her bedroom, surrounded by littered memories of the past. Lily peered over her shoulder at the photograph in her hand. It was of her and Rose, they were maybe six, eating ice cream. Rose's face frozen in a laugh, Lily smiling despite the fact she had ice cream on her face, which, if memory served her right, had ended up there when she'd tried to wrestle her cone away from Rose. Rose had always wanted what Lily had, even when they were children. It was with bitter melancholy that Lily noted nothing had changed.

"You were always the pretty one, the one with the stunning smile, the one who made Mum and Dad proud," Rose said. She didn't move, simply seemed to sense Lily was there.

Lily swallowed. "Yes, well. You did that to yourself."

They both continued to stare at the photograph, neither moving for a long time.

Finally, Rose looked up at her. "I'm sorry, Lil. Really I am."

"What for, Rose? For stealing my ice cream? For sleeping with my husband? For destroying my life?"

Rose bowed her head sombrely. "For everything. Especially for James."

"So he knew it was you then?" Lily snapped.

"Yes."

"I don't believe you!" Lily yelled down at her, as if screaming at her sister would make it less true.

"He knew it was me. Knew it was me this past year."

Lily felt her anger grow. It hadn't even been just the once. James had betrayed her, sleeping with the enemy in more ways than one. That was, if Rose was telling the truth, and, frankly, she no longer knew who or what to believe. Everything was turning into one immense lie. Lily wasn't having it any longer, no more would she roll over and just take it. It was time for some answers. Time for the truth.

"Drink this," Lily said, shoving the vial at her sister.

"Why should I do that?" Rose asked, realisation dawning on her face as she read the label between Lily's clenched fingers.

"Because for once in your life you're going to do something decent for me. I want the truth. I want to know for once I'm getting the truth."

Rose looked from the vial to her sister then back again. She surprised Lily by plucking the glass from her fingers, uncorking it, and downing the lot without another word.

"Happy?" Rose asked, but the moment the word left her mouth her eyes glazed over and her eyelids flickered. The empty tube fell to the ground next to her.

"Not particularly," Lily replied angrily, even though she knew Rose wouldn't react to anything except a question under the influence of Veritaserum. She drew a deep breath before speaking again. She needed to test Rose, to make sure it was her, to make sure the potion had worked.

Lily glanced back at the photo, nodding at it. "The bunny," she said, looking at the soft toy cradled against her chest, "What was its name?"

"Fluffy." The dullness of her voice sent a shiver up Lily's spine.

"And what did you rename it when you stole it from me?"

"Hugo. He was my only friend." Despite Rose's monotone, for a moment Lily felt sorry for her.

So, it was Rose.

Satisfied for now that her plan was working, Lily moved on to her real questions. "Did... did James know it was you, did he know it was you he was," Lily drew a deep, calming breath, "having sex with?"

"Yes." Her answer was immediate, and Lily now knew what she'd thought she'd dreaded was indeed the truth.

"How do you know he knew?" she asked desperately, maybe there was a mistake, maybe

"Because he sent me Owls. He called me Rose. He saw the Dark Mark."

No, there was no mistake. It was true James was filth, as bad as he'd been at Hogwarts. She should have known better. Lily suddenly felt very, very stupid. Stupid for ever doubting that he hadn't slept with Rose, stupid for having married him, heck, stupid for even agreeing to go on that first date.

"For how long, Rose? How long has this affair been going on?" she pressed on, though she didn't know why. It didn't really matter. James Potter had lied, he'd cheated, and then lied some more. Their sham of a marriage was over.

Rose's eyelids flickered again. "For over a year."

Lily just shook her head. She wasn't going to cry, there was no point.

"And you are pregnant? With James' baby?"

"Yes."

"Why, Rose? Why would you do this to me?" Lily whispered, as if talking quietly Rose wouldn't hear her. Lily didn't expect an answer, but she got one anyway.

"At first I did it to get back at you, you and your perfect life. Then I fell in love with him."

Rose was in love with James. Lily could feel her heart wrenching apart again, partly for herself, partly for her sister. The memory of him shrugging his shoulders at Rose as she'd desperately looked to him for help when Lily had exiled her from Godric's Hollow ripped through her.

As she paced the room the whole situation suddenly sunk in. And Lily felt oddly at ease with it. She was calm, almost too calm.

"Does You-Know-Who know all of this? That you're pregnant with James' baby?"

"No." Rose's eyes came into focus for a moment, before glazing over again. "He'll kill me when he does find out, me and the baby."

Lily's rubbed at her forehead. She asked her next question with her eyes clenched shut. "What are you going to do now?"

"I don't know."

Lily sat there, dumfounded. So many things were running through her head. In a matter of days she'd gone from being reasonably happily well not happily, but tolerably married, to ...well...this, whatever this was.

There had to be an explanation, there had to be something else to it. This couldn't be the truth!

Then she realised that she had made one very big oversight. She had no real proof that Snape had even given her the real potion, Rose could just as easily have been pretending. After all, they both worked for Lord Voldemort, who was to say, after all this time, that Snape still hated Rose, that he wasn't working with Rose in this grandiose fabrication of the truth? Rose could fairly easily fake the symptoms, Lily didn't doubt for a moment that, in her time with Lord Voldemort, Rose had seen the potion used many times. Lord Voldemort that gave her an idea.

"What is the Dark Lord's name, Rose?"

Rose's eyelids flickered quickly, their usually emerald irises now a dull green. "Tom Riddle."

It hadn't been the name she'd expected, she never thought of Voldemort, that monster, as Tom Riddle, and certainly no Death Eater would dare to call him that, not if they valued their lives.

What did it matter what she called him? What did any of it matter? Her sister had been telling the truth.

She looked at Rose. Then she looked at her sister's belly again. At Godric's Hollow it hadn't been visible, but here her bulge was huge. The baby must be due anytime now; she must have been hiding it from the world. Rose had done it again, systematically torn apart Lily's life, destroyed everything.

"I don't care what you do, Rose Evans." Lily stopped her idle walking, and pushed passed her sister to the doorway with every intention of storming out and slamming the door hard. "Your Dark Lord can have you. I... I wish you were dead!"

Lily didn't know why she even went to him. As she'd held the letter the owl had brought her, his words practically begging for her to see him, she knew she shouldn't. Two weeks had passed since she had spoken to Rose, and now she was trying desperately to bury everything from her past, all the hurt, all the pain, behind her. Yet, all the same, she found herself in the same shadowed walkway in Knockturn Alley, her footsteps echoing on the cobblestones as she approached the dark figure of Severus Snape.

"Lily!" His voice was filled with relief. His hand reached out to her, but without her even saying a word, he drew it sharply back as if she'd burnt him.

"What do you want?" she snapped.

He looked her over, from head to toe, making her uneasy. Seemingly satisfied, he spoke quietly, so quietly Lily had to step closer to hear him. "I've come to warn you. The Dark Lord... he wants to kill you, you and your baby!"

"My ba" she began, then stopped. So Rose and James had carried out at least part of their plan to delude others into thinking it was Lily's baby, they had just missed one vital step Lily knew the truth. "Well, that's so kind of you to warn me, Snape," he recoiled at her use of his surname, but Lily pretended not to notice, "but he wants to kill a lot of people. Big deal."

"You don't understand! The prophecy.... He thinks it means your son! He thinks he has to kill him in order to live!" He was pleading with her, begging her to understand. Even his eyes showed a sparkle of life, a hint at the Severus she knew had known.

So Rose had given birth to a boy. Lily found it mattering little to her. "Prophecy? What prophecy?"

Snape rubbed angrily at his forehead, as if trying to place his thoughts in some semblance of order. "He thinks it means he has to kill your baby, or your baby is going to kill him."

"A baby is going to kill *him*?" Lily laughed out loud.

"Lily, I'm serious. Please, you have to listen to me."

Something in his voice, in his face, made her suddenly sober.

"Come away with me. Bring the baby, I'll keep you safe. We can start over somewhere, somewhere where he can't find us, where"

For a moment, she was tempted. How easy it would be to say yes, to go back to how it had been when they were younger, just her and Severus and nothing else mattered but she was no longer a child, she had responsibilities, responsibilities she couldn't just shrug off. It seemed as if the fate of the entire wizarding world rested on her shoulders. "No, Snape. I can't just walk away from all my friends, leave them to be butchered by Death Eaters." She paused and looked at him darkly. "You might not have such a problem with that, but I've lost too many people already. I do not intend to lose any more."

And with that, her decision was made. She might not like Rose very much, but she was still her sister. And her little boy, he was her nephew.

A plan began forming in her head. She turned to leave, then paused and looked back over her shoulder at him. He looked pained. She told herself she didn't care.

"Oh, and you might want to tell *dear* Dark Lord that my sister is dead. We wouldn't want him thinking she was late for your next meeting, now, would we?"

"Lily! Please!" She could hear it in his voice, his desperation.

But with a loud *crack*, Lily Disappeared.

It had taken two days, two days without sleep, without resting, but Lily had finally managed to locate Rose. Through word of mouth, rumours garnered from not-so-pleasant characters in Knockturn Alley, and a bit of luck, finally she found her holed up in a tiny room at the Hog's Head.

Lily banged loudly on the door, but there was no reply. "Rose! It's Lily!" She thumped again on the door, knocked so hard it hurt her fist.

The door cracked open. Emerald eyes, the mirror image of her own, peeked out into the corridor, terrified.

"Quickly," Rose said, glancing anxiously up and down the hallway and pulling her sister inside.

Lily took a moment to survey the room. Then she saw him. Lying in his cot, fast asleep, was a baby. A baby boy with the same dark, messy hair as James.

Lily crept over to the cot and watched him sleep, watched his chest rise and fall, his eyelids twitch occasionally. Saw his tiny heartbeat pulsing beneath his top. And then

she knew she'd made the right decision.

Like stepping out of someone else's embittered life, Lily shivered as icy cold prickled across her shoulders and down her spine. Tears welled freely, blurring her vision of the sleeping infant. In that single moment, in an instant more real than any other she had ever known, Lily, cheated wife, betrayed sister, rose above all the wrongs ever done to her. She stood tall, pushed back her shoulders, and sniffed back the tears that no longer needed to fall. She stared at the Hog's Head's mangy curtains, stared at nothing; she stared at her future. She was resolute, she was lucid. She had grown up.

"You're to come back to Godric's Hollow, Rose. I'll look after you."

It was a proclamation. A cessation of hostility. Rose was her twin and she would look after her.

"But Lil, the Dark Lord, he wants to kill us! He wants to kill Harry!"

"No, he wants to kill me and my baby," Lily informed her, but without any malice. "The Order have fed the information that you have been killed," she swallowed thickly, "to his most loyal followers."

Rose hung her head. "I'm so sorry, Lil, I just didn't know what to do. I had to keep Harry safe. I couldn't just let him take him.... So I told him you were pregnant, I hid my condition from him...."

Lily closed her eyes, waiting for the anger she would once have felt at Rose sacrificing Lily's life for her own. But it didn't come. Nothing mattered now except keeping her little, helpless nephew safe. But, she knew now why Severus Snape believed it was *her*, Lily, that was pregnant. Oh, Severus! Where was he now when she needed him?

"As we speak, your Dark Lord believes you are dead," Lily spoke, hoping Snape had dutifully relayed the message. "But you're to come back to the house with me with me and James - and we will all keep Harry safe."

Lily watched on in amazement as she saw her sister's eyes fill with grateful tears. "Oh, Lil, thank you!"

Lily held up her hand to stop her. "And in return, you will give the Order all the information you have on He Who Must Not Be Named."

Rose grimaced.

"Do you really want your son growing up in a world ruled by him?"

Rose looked past her sister at Harry's sleeping form. "All right, I'll give you everything."

And so they returned to Godric's Hollow. After a lot of not-so-pleasant discussions, James Potter finally grasped the Quaffle, took some responsibility, and worked with Lily's plan. She'd made it clear to them that this arrangement was just until the end of the war, until Voldemort was gone and she would know the baby would be safe.

As far as the outside world was aware, nothing was awry. Lily and James Potter were happily married, and now they had a son, one Lily had kept hidden for his own safety. Little Harry James Potter. He looked like his father, though he had her sister's eyes. No, her own eyes. Definitely Aunt Lily's eyes. There was no hint of malice in the boy, and even at this early stage Lily knew, with her help, he wouldn't turn out like his parents.

And though it pained Lily somewhat to see James and Rose so happy together, the time she spent with her new nephew eased it all considerably. Lily couldn't say she was happy, but she knew what she was doing what was right.

Lily sat at the kitchen table next to James. It felt odd, sitting there, pretending life in the Potter household was normal, though not as weird as it had to start with. At least now there was a purpose.

Baby Harry bounced on Lily's lap, tugging happily at her hair, not a worry in the world. No knowledge that there was a war waging outside, not the foggiest that his mother wasn't his mother at all, but his aunt. No idea that, even as he gurgled away, Voldemort was hunting him down. Hunting down dear Harry, Lily thought, hugging the boy tightly. Just a little baby, not hurting a soul.

"You can't use me as the Secret Keeper," Sirius told them.

"Why not?" Lily demanded. Trust Sirius to shrug responsibility at any given opportunity.

"Because he'll know it's me, it's too obvious."

He had a point, she realised. To everyone, Sirius was the Potter's best friend, but even Sirius had no idea what was going on behind the closed doors of the Potter house at Godric's Hollow.

"Then, who do you suggest?" Lily snapped.

Rose had already offered. Lily had found the idea laughable. As much as her sister claimed to have changed, and yes, she had been good to Harry, she was a very good mother, Lily wasn't sure for one moment that her sister would hold up under pressure.

"Peter Pettigrew."

Lily had contemplated that suggestion for a moment. Peter Pettigrew. The years since school had not done him any justice; he'd simply turned into a larger version of the simpering lad who'd worshipped the ground James and Sirius had walked upon at Hogwarts. He did indeed seem like an unlikely choice of Secret Keeper. Though Lily doubted he too would stand up to the pressure should he be forced to give away their secret, she doubted very much that anyone would ever suspect him.

"Fine."

James nodded, reaching out to ruffle his son's dark hair. "Okay then. Peter it is."

And with those words, Lily and James sealed Harry's fate.

Lily stood at the sink, washing up the day's dishes, lost in thought. She'd always enjoyed Halloween, it was possibly her favourite celebration, but tonight's party had been limited to the two cans of spaghetti left in the cupboards. No one had been to the shops in weeks, no one dared. When had life got this complicated?

She nearly jumped out of her skin when warm arms wrapped around her waist, lips landed on the exposed flesh of her neck and a deep murmur in her ear informed her, "Meet me in the bedroom in five, I'll get the Ice Queen out of our hair."

"Is that what I am?" Lily hissed, turning around so quickly that James Potter had to grab at the bench for stability.

"What Lily? I mean, I knew it was you, I thought..."

"Don't bullshit me, James Potter. You know what? If it weren't for Harry, I'd have you hung!"

"What's going on?" Rose asked, glancing nervously between Lily and James as they glared at one another.

Lily looked from Rose to James and back again.

"Nothing," she finally said. There was no point. In time, Rose would learn what James was like, but right now was not the time to be starting arguments, not with Lord Voldemort out there hunting down Harry. But she needed to get out of here, to have a break from them for a while. "I'm just going to get some milk. Harry's not had anything but water to drink in days. It's not good for him," Lily said, grabbing her purse from the kitchen table.

"Okay," Rose replied, dropping herself into one of the kitchen chairs. "Can you get me some cigarettes while you're out?"

Lily nodded, pulling on a large green cloak. "Want anything?" she asked James.

He shook his head. "Lily, look. Don't go out like this, I mean like that. Take the Invisibility Cloak."

"You lent it to Albus," Lily told him, pulling the hood lower over her face.

Lily stepped outside the door and immediately froze. There, standing under the large oak in the backyard, was a tall, thin, black-hooded figure. It was the bloodied appearance of the whites of his eyes, though, that had Lily dive back inside the house and click the door quietly shut. She leant back against the frame, breathing deeply.

He couldn't have seen her, it was impossible. The house was under the protection of the Fidelius Charm.

Out the corner of her eye, she caught James and Rose springing apart, but right then, she couldn't have cared less what they were doing.

"He's out there."

"Who?" James asked dumbly.

"Someone in a cloak," she blurted out. "His eyes were awful! He has the most hideous blood-red eyes!"

Rose froze to the spot.

"But how?" James reasoned. "He can't know we're here, someone must have told him...."

Lily and James' eyes both turned on Rose. "I didn't tell him!"

"You... you did!" James barked.

"No, she didn't," Lily said quietly. "She couldn't have. Peter is our Secret Keeper."

"Peter?" Rose asked, her voice rising in a squeak. "Peter Pettigrew?"

"Yes," James said. "I don't know how he did it, but he must have broken through the charm somehow...."

"Pettigrew has been reporting to the Dark Lord for over a year!" Rose cried out.

"Why didn't you tell us?" James rounded on her, glaring down over her.

"I thought you knew!" Rose's eyes bulged, and she bolted from the room. James looked as if he was about to go after her.

"Never mind that, we've got to do something, we've got to" Lily peeked back out the window. "He's coming! Quickly!"

James stepped up to the window beside her. "Lily, take Harry and go! It's him! Go! Run! I'll hold him off"

Lily scrambled for Harry's bedroom, but even as she bolted down the hallway, the entire house was bathed in a flash of green light, filled with the deathly echo of the Killing Curse, and then a dull thud of dead flesh hitting tiled floor.

"Save me, Lily, please." The voice was no more than a whisper as she entered Harry's room. And there, curled in a ball in the corner, was Rose.

"Get up on your feet, Rose Evans, and for once in your life take responsibility!" Lily snapped at her. "You owe it to me. You owe it to Harry!"

Rose looked terrified, but, slowly, she rose to wobbly feet.

"Better," Lily muttered. Then all was still. The complete lack of sound unnerved her.

With her heart thumping loudly in her ears, Lily waited, wand drawn, pointed at the door.

The bang came out of nowhere. Light flooded the room, giving her just enough time to side step the door as it flew of its hinges and into the room.

Voldemort paused, only for a moment, taking in the two sisters. Lily tried to disarm him. Rose cast the Cruciatus Curse at the same time, but he deflected them both, the spells rebounding on them. As Lily's wand flew across the room, Rose crumpled to the floor, screaming in pain.

"So," Voldemort spoke, and the hissing sound that accompanied his voice chilled Lily to the bone. "You dare to betray me..."

He looked at them both, then turned to Lily and smiled. "Rose."

She saw him raise his wand, saw the look of triumph. "*Avada*"

"No!" Rose flew across the room, placing herself between her sister and Voldemort. The flash of green hit her square in the chest. Her body hit the floor, lifeless.

Lily forced herself to look back up, to face Voldemort.

She saw him surveying Harry's cot, his grotesque face twisted in a demented smile.

"Not Harry, not Harry, please not Harry!"

She flew across the room, shielding Harry from him with her body. As disgusting as she found the sight, she forced herself to look him the eyes, those terrifying, blood-red eyes.

"Stand aside, you silly girl ... stand aside now." His voice made her shudder, but she didn't waiver.

"Not Harry, please no, take me, kill me instead"

He kept approaching, kept reducing the small space between them. Without her wand, Lily had no choice. She hit him, punched him with her fists. Again, and again, but it made no difference. She grabbed hold of him, tried to pull him away, tried to take his wand, but it was all in vain. He tossed her away from him like a rag doll.

"Not Harry! Please ... have mercy ... have mercy...." She scrambled back to her feet, placing herself between him and Harry once more.

"I warned you Rose, you could have been spared. Silly girl. *Avada Kedavra! Avada Kedavra!*"

And she crumpled to the ground. She felt as if she were dying, that these would be her last moments. Her breathing had stopped, her world became painfully quiet.

In the distance she could hear a cold, cruel laugh. She could see Voldemort standing above her, standing over Harry's cot, could see the look of twisted triumph on his face, could see him, but could not move, could not breathe. It didn't matter, it was too late. With two quick curses he had killed them both. She was dead, Harry was dead.

Then, as her eyes faltered, she caught sight of the most amazing thing: Voldemort crumpled, the room spun and finally he vanished into nothing but vapour.

And then everything went black.

Chapter Eleven

Chapter 11 of 18

COMPLETE! Hermione knows his secrets, his destiny unfulfilled. Snape sees only desolate dark. But in the tale of love and longing, Lily remembers everything.

All is not as it seems. The world of wizards is full of lies and half-truths.

Over twenty years ago, Severus Snape fell in love with Lily Evans, and he never stopped loving her. His every move, his every thought, is purely for her. And he has only one place, a room, hidden deep under the lake, where he can relax, not worry about whom he is spying on, what he should be saying and doing, where his loyalties lie. Somewhere he can reminisce about his childhood days there with Lily, to allow himself space to grieve.

That though, as with everything else, is about to change.

Fifteen years later...

Severus Snape sat in his office, staring blankly down at the essays before him. He should have been marking them, he knew he should. The sixth years would need them back come Monday morning and it was highly likely that the Dark Lord would call him at any moment, wanting the latest update on Draco's progress with his assignment.

Damn that assignment!

Why had he ever agreed to that Unbreakable Vow?

Why had he made that promise to Dumbledore, the self-sacrificing fool?

Why the hell had he got out of bed this morning?

He rubbed at the bridge of his overly large nose in frustration.

He sunk back in his chair, and took a long, not-quite-calming drink from his glass of Firewhisky.

Finally, he picked up the top essay with a sigh. They weren't going to mark themselves. Glancing down at the neat, minuscule writing, he froze. Miss Granger's essay.

And why wouldn't she just go away? He added that to his list of internal pondering for later. Much later.

Now was not the time to have his mind dawdling over that high-intellect, that incessant questioning, that persistent perfection, that horrid, disgusting, appalling, offensive way his traitorous mind kept drifting to her. Drifting to her and enjoying it!

As if he didn't have enough reason to loathe himself already without lusting after a student.

But this war had done something to her; she had grown so much over the past years. Or perhaps he'd grown to tolerate her. Well, not tolerate her, hate her less.

Especially when she smiled.

He crumpled her essay into a ball in his fist and threw it across the room.

Staring at the spot where the parchment had hit the wall, Severus found the dire need to sober up. Shoving the tumbler of alcohol to the far side of his desk, he contemplated pushing it right off the edge to smash into a million pieces on the ground. So tempting. But no, that would bring the house-elves and right now he did not want company. He never wanted company.

He pulled open his desk drawer and, lifting a carefully placed stack of papers on the history of Pepperup Potion, enough to bore any prying eyes from delving further, he pulled out the photograph.

Lily. Dear Lily. She stood smiling next to him. They were fifteen. Between them they held the trophy from the Potions contest in their fourth year. There'd been no contest really, Lily and he had won hands down, their poison antidote outshining all others. Even to this day, he had to smile. No one seemed to have noticed the great lumps of bezoars in the otherwise useless potion. No one else seemed to think of the obvious.

And in the photograph, Lily was smiling. And next to her, Severus was too. It was one of those rare moments; Severus couldn't remember the last time he'd really smiled. He looked relaxed, occasionally glancing at Lily, staring at her, before turning back to the camera. But she was beautiful, as stunning as ever, with that pretty smile, her

inner perfection brought to life in the sparkle of her eyes.

But she wasn't alive. He'd lost her in the cave, and the world had lost her at Godric's Hollow.

He'd loved her. He still loved her; his heart ached for her. His entire being ached for her. And he had the scars to prove it, the suffering he'd endured over the years all for her for her and she was dead.

He was not going through that again.

Not that love was what he felt for Miss Granger, certainly not. More of an infatuation. Yes, an infatuation with a bushy haired pain in the arse who was possibly the only woman on the planet who might want him, and only then because she had no other options. An infatuation stemmed from the fact that he hadn't had sex in nineteen years. It was bound to drive any warm-blooded male just slightly mad.

He'd done it to himself, though. Nineteen years and each time the infrequent offers came in he'd pushed them away. He just couldn't bare the thought of being with anyone but Lily, as if it would erase the memory of her. Silly, really, since he'd spent nineteen years trying to forget her.

Another few months and he would make it to a full two decades of abstinence.

Maybe it was time he wiped the slate clean.

After all, what could Dumbledore do? He couldn't put him through hell any further than he already was. The Headmaster had practically condemned him to a life in Azkaban anyway, consorting with a student wouldn't make the slightest bit of difference.

Maybe that could go onto his 'things to dwell upon later' list. Maybe.

Severus grabbed up his quill, dipped it harshly in the bottle of red ink, splashing a great pool of the blood-thick liquid over his desk. With a flick of his wand, the scroll of parchment flew back to his desk and smoothed back out, and without so much as reading a line, he marked it with T. He was being petty, and he knew it, but who cared? It wasn't like he would be teaching here for much longer anyway.

He turned to the next essay. Potter. Blast, the heavens seemed to be working against him today!

Everything seemed to be working against him. Even Dumbledore.

"Oh, Lily," he muttered, looking back at her photograph. "Why?"

He needed a break.

He needed to remember why. Why he was putting himself through all this torment.

Severus wasn't surprised to find Dungeon Five dark and vacant. Partly because nothing seemed to surprise him anymore, but mostly because Slytherin had just taken a beating from the Gryffindor Quidditch team, so Slughorn was most likely off congratulating the Gryffindors. Well, at least those he thought worthy of his presence. The thought brought a sneer to Severus' lips.

However, as he reached the inside of the storeroom, he paused. The dust along the edges of the shelves had been disturbed, recently, apparently, given that tiny particles still floated in the air around his head caught in the light of his wand.

His heart skipped a beat or two. Someone had found his sanctuary. Someone who was probably searching through all the vials of his memories right now. Someone who most certainly shouldn't be there!

Fury raged in him, those were his memories. His! Not for prying eyes, not for anyone!

He moved stealthily down the cave, ducking to miss smacking his head in places. Finally, temper at an all time high, fists clenched so hard they hurt, wand gripped so tightly he wondered if it would splinter, he reached the end of the tunnel. He froze for a moment in his steps. The door to the cave lay open just a crack, and beyond he could see light. Candles were lit, and the blue glow of the fire, of Lily's fire, was just visible.

How dare someone waste Lily's fire!

He crept forward, wand ready, and slowly pushed the door open. His Pensieve lay on one pumpkin fizz box, as it always did. But inside, inside he could see colour emanating from the basin, could see the glow of candlelight flickering within.

Someone someone was in his memories!

He lowered his wand, darted across the room and peered into the basin. There, beneath the surface, was the image of the cave. But the pumpkin fizz boxes were gone; instead there was a bed. And on the bed, two bodies writhing. That night with Lily, that only night with Lily.

Severus heart swelled until it burst.

She'd been so beautiful, that porcelain skin, that deep red hair. And the look on her face as she watched him pleasure her

But he knew what was to come. The look on her face when she saw the Dark Mark. That look of horror, disgust and loathing.

Stupid. He'd been so stupid.

He couldn't keep watching this, it tortured him. But they weren't there yet, still they pulsed together on the bed, still he was making her happy or at least he hoped he was.

He averted his eyes. He couldn't look anymore, it hurt too much, but, out the corner of his eye, he saw a figure silhouetted by Lily's fire. A bushy-haired shadow.

Miss Granger. What the hell?

Severus leant forward and dropped himself quietly into the whispering swirl of his own memories.

He stood right behind her, watching her watching him. Watching him make love to Lily.

A flush crept up Severus' face, but he forced it away. No, it would be Miss Granger who would be embarrassed over this, not him.

Severus opened his mouth to snarl something cruel, to tell her she should take in every moment of it for she certainly would never get anything like that from a boy, but she made him stop. Or at least the short, sharp intake of breath and the heated colour of her skin made him stop.

She was enjoying it.

A little moan came from her throat.

Enjoying it very much.

How very interesting, how very interesting indeed.

He should stop her, wrench her from his memory now. But something made him pause. He told himself it would be worth letting her continue, to let her keep watching, to pull her out just before just before Lily left, when her humiliation at being caught would be at its peak. Deep inside, though, there was the need to simply keep watching her. Severus closed his mouth and silently scrutinised her.

He could see her shoulders rising and falling with each deep breath, hear the little gasps as she watched him and Lily on the bed, but when her hands moved, sliding over her clothes, up her sides from her thighs to barely touching the sides of her breasts, it was he who suddenly found his breath vaporised. And she continued, brushing one finger over her lips as his image kissed Lily's. Never did she go so far as fondling herself, always just small touches, barely-there brushes, but Severus had to fight not to reach out and touch her himself.

He could hear the ecstasy-heated words coming from the image of himself, coming from Lily. But they were merely an echo in the background, a worn-out recording. His eyes were still locked on Hermione, still watching her as she slid her hands over herself, as she tilted her head back. In this light, she really did look quite beautiful.

He heard her gasp, heard the room turn suddenly silent.

A sharp crack resounded through the room. Severus' head snapped up, staring at the past. Staring as Lily withdrew her hand from slapping him.

"How dare you? How dare you?!" Lily's shrill voice bit through the room, stabbing him in the chest.

Like watching someone get splinched, he couldn't turn away.

"Let me explain!" Gods, his younger self sounded pathetic.

He watched as she spelled her clothes back on, watched the sodden material drip onto the waterlogged cave floor.

"There is nothing to explain, Severus," Lily said coldly. "It's over."

The echo of the door slamming shut felt as if it were bursting his eardrums.

He kept watching himself, watching himself sit there, stunned. He heard himself scream in anger, claw desperately at the Dark Mark, as if he could remove it. Silly twit!

And to think he'd taken the Mark for her. What had he been thinking? As if the Dark Lord would have cared to whom Mudbloods were attached to; wives of Death Eaters or Muggles, unless they were of use, they were still to be eradicated. All done in order to keep her safe, and, in the end, it was what had killed her. If he'd never overheard that prophecy, if he'd not run to tell the Dark Lord like a pathetically faithful sycophant

Oh, the hours he'd spent reliving this memory, standing here, screaming at his image to do something, anything. It had all been fruitless, of course. They were just shadows of his past.

The movement next to him startled him. Miss Granger, he'd forgotten she was there. She moved forward, over towards the memory of Severus. She reached out, her hand hovering near younger Severus' arm. His image just sat there, staring at the door, he couldn't see her, of course.

"What did you do?"

Enough!

"If I were you," he said in his Darkest voice, "I would be far more concerned with what I *am* going to do."

Her head jerked up, and with wide eyes, mouth hanging open, she stared back at him.

"SSorry," she stuttered.

Severus felt himself rise up, out of the Pensieve, back into the cave, the cave without the bed, without the echo of having lost Lily. His memory had vanished; it was a pity he couldn't put the gut wrenching feeling of having watched Lily leave him again so easily out of his mind. Nineteen years and it still hurt like it was yesterday. And it was her fault, Miss Granger's fault, if she hadn't been there he wouldn't have had to witness his torment over Lily walking out of his life, wouldn't have had to relive the horror of losing her again.

Hermione went to push passed him, run for the door. He wasn't letting her get away that easily, letting her walk out of here with such intimate knowledge of him. He stepped into her path, not letting her pass.

"Don't you dare mention this to anyone," he hissed at her, purposefully pulling himself more upright, straightening out his shoulders that had slumped in defeat at the sight of Lily's retreat.

"NNo. I won't."

She side-stepped him, but he reached out and grabbed her arm, spinning her around.

"No one! If you so much as" But his fingers had connected with her skin, and suddenly all thought left him. She felt so wonderful, so soft. It had been too long, way too long. And all those little fantasies that had tormented him for the last who-knew-how-long rushed through his mind. He was alone with her, deep beneath the lake where no one could see, not even Dumbledore and his ever-watchful gaze.

It was tempting, so tempting.

And the way she'd tried to comfort his memory-self; maybe she did care. Maybe she pitied him.

Maybe he just didn't care any more, he was doomed anyway.

And she was staring up at him with big brown eyes, the smallest of nervous smiles on her face, curving her lips in the way he found so desirable. More importantly, she wasn't screaming bloody murder and running for her life.

To hell with it all, he deserved this.

With one hand under her chin, tilting her face back just a little more, he scrutinised her. Her eyes opened further in surprise, but still she didn't run.

His lips met hers, and, despite himself, he kissed her gently, tentatively. Her lips were full under his, soft. When she didn't pull back, didn't bolt from the room, he buried his hands in her mop of hair, pulling her closer to him. She felt so wonderful, smelled so good. She filled all of his senses, left his mind overwhelmed. Hermione let out a little moan and, as her mouth opened, he delved his tongue inside, restraint completely lost. She was kissing him back! Her tongue duelled with his, her lips gliding over his; she held her own, meeting him move for move.

But instead of satiating his desire, Severus felt it grow, felt the need to have more of her, all of her. It had been too long, far too long, since he'd last done this. Since he'd first done this.

He moved one hand down her back, crushing her against him. He felt her gasp against his lips as his painfully hard erection pressed through his trousers and against her stomach. He heard his own moan of desire, so alien to his ears, echo around the cave.

"Lily," he murmured against her mouth.

Hermione leapt back, pushing him fiercely away.

It took him a moment to realise what was wrong, but he could practically still hear Lily's name echoing around the stone walls.

"Hermione," he corrected, but it was too late. It sounded pathetic even to his ears.

"I have to go."

And she left, bolted from the cave.

The second woman to walk out of his life. A miserable score, he thought bitterly, two out of two.

Severus sat down on the pumpkin fizz box and ran his hands through his greasy hair.

What had he done?

Lily hid in the shadows, James' no, it was Harry's now 'borrowed' invisibility cloak pulled tightly around her. He wouldn't miss it for the moment, he was off celebrating Gryffindor's win over Slytherin and quite a celebration it would be! She longed for a moment that she'd been there to witness the party, but something had drawn her down to the dungeons. She watched and waited, then waited some more. But even then, Severus didn't come out of Dungeon Five. What was taking him so long? Hermione had left nearly an hour ago, and now Lily's legs were aching and she wasn't sure she could stay still for much longer. She was going to have to move, to sit down.

Lily almost jumped when the classroom door finally clicked open. Severus stepped out into the corridor looking worried, more worried than she'd seen him in the longest time, even recently, and it was more than obvious that something had been tormenting him of late.

She longed to go to him, to soothe him, to find out what was wrong, just as much as she longed to give him another decent slap for being such a fool. But she could do neither, to do so would put Harry in jeopardy, would put the whole battle against Lord Voldemort at risk.

He went to make his way up the corridor, passing her by. She relaxed. The danger had passed.

He stopped suddenly, turned around.

She held her breath.

He stared straight at her.

No, not straight at her, through her. But still, he seemed to sense something. His eyes darted around the small alcove in which she hid, not moving at all, not even a rise of his chest. For a moment he looked as if he would step forward.

He was close enough to touch. If she wanted, she could reach out and feel him, his chest beneath her fingers, his arms, his fingers, run her hands over his hallowed face, just touch him. But then, suddenly, he shook his head, spun around, and headed off up the corridor.

Lily closed her eyes and sunk to the floor.

AN: Hugs and pumpkin fizz to my wonderful beta :-)

Chapter Twelve

Chapter 12 of 18

COMPLETE! Hermione knows his secrets, his destiny unfulfilled. Snape sees only desolate dark. But in the tale of love and longing, Lily remembers everything.

All is not as it seems. The world of wizards is full of lies and half-truths.

Over twenty years ago, Severus Snape fell in love with Lily Evans, and he never stopped loving her. His every move, his every thought, is purely for her. And he has only one place, a room, hidden deep under the lake, where he can relax, not worry about whom he is spying on, what he should be saying and doing, where his loyalties lie. Somewhere he can reminisce about his childhood days there with Lily, to allow himself space to grieve.

That though, as with everything else, is about to change.

Chapter Twelve

It should have been easy, should have been simple.

For the first time in his life, Severus was intimidated by the prospect of teaching. They were only a bunch of seventeen-year-old children and he was teaching Defence Against the Dark Arts, his favourite subject. He knew the curriculum, knew it inside out. Compared to spying on the Dark Lord, teaching shouldn't have even rated on his terror scale.

But it was *far* from easy, miles away from simple.

He'd kissed Hermione Granger, Gryffindor's resident know-it-all, Potter's substitute brain, Weasley's substitute mother, and his, well, substitute Lily, if he were to be honest with himself. At least, he could only assume that was what she was, after his grave error two nights ago.

He'd called her Lily. Even the thought of it made his stomach churn and heated his cheeks.

But had he really been thinking of Lily?

Yes, he had. But he had also been thinking about Hermione. It was her hair in his hands. It was her full lips he had kissed. It was she who haunted his dreams and tormented his fantasies.

But none of that mattered. He'd called her Lily and she'd bolted like a Seeker who'd seen the Snitch.

Maybe his error had just brought her to her senses, made her realise what she was doing. Kissing her teacher, kissing a Death Eater, kissing a fool. Kissing him.

It didn't matter. It was only a matter of time before his entire world would shatter and he did not intend to break her with it. She wouldn't want him now, anyway. And that was making the very large assumption that she ever had.

Closing his eyes briefly, he drew a deep breath. *Just get it over with.* He swooped across the Defence Against the Dark Arts classroom, yanked open the door to the corridor and ordered the students in. And refused to look at *her*.

They shuffled in, silently taking their seats.

"How is an Inferius identified?"

The moment the question had left his mouth, he'd regretted it. Even though he was looking at the blackboard where the charmed chalk was writing '*Inferi: Identification*' he could already imagine Hermione waving her hand around impatiently, waiting to be called on. He would be asking no more questions during this class.

"Miss" He turned around, and stopped. She wasn't bouncing out of her seat in enthusiasm to answer his question. In fact, she was bent over her textbook, her hair falling in a fluff of frizz over her eyes.

Oh gods. What had he done?

Looking around the classroom, silently praying someone else would answer his question, he could see the equal surprise on her classmates' faces, all of whom were staring at her. Potter even elbowed her and hissed, "Hermione, he asked a question!"

She shook her head briefly, shrugging Potter off.

He didn't wait for any longer for an answer. "There are not necessarily any signs that someone is an Inferius. Certainly, they lack personality, but then so do most of you. Of course, if the body has been deceased for any length of time, the smell should be warning enough."

Faces paled around the classroom, but Hermione's head stayed buried in her book. Severus drew an angry, self-loathing breath.

"That might just be the stench emanating from the Quidditch changing rooms after Gryffindor's team has been practising," Draco quipped.

The sniggers from the Slytherin section of the classroom did nothing to make him feel better.

The class went on and, by the end of it, Severus felt as if he hadn't really been there. Certainly, he'd informed them about Inferi, warned them, told them everything they needed to know, but he felt detached by the whole scene. And not once did Hermione look at him.

He went to dismiss the class, only to spy the essays on his desk. He had to stop this, had to stop dwelling on her, it was distracting him too much. But he couldn't; she wouldn't leave his mind. With a flick of his wand, the essays zoomed through the air, landing on their owner's desks.

"For your homework you will write twelve inches identifying Inferi, the precautions to be taken and when not to approach one."

The class scrambled for the door. All of them. All except Hermione who sat there staring at her parchment.

A wash of terror overcame Severus. He'd never changed her mark, it still bore the blood red T. Even from his desk, he could see where the ink had seeped through the parchment.

She got to her feet, stuffed the parchment angrily in her bag and went to leave.

He couldn't do it, couldn't let her go thinking her essay had been that bad, that he was that petty.

He drew a shaky breath. "A word, Miss Granger."

She looked at him for the first time all class. She glanced at the door and for a moment he thought she was going to simply walk out. She stood there, seemingly torn for what felt like an eternity, but finally, and with an impatient tut, she turned away from the door and approached his desk. He shouldn't have done that, he should have gone to her, given her something instead of demanding her presence.

"Yes, sir?"

Her voice was quieter than usual, but crisp. Severus felt his heart wrenching. When had she slipped under his skin, begun to mean so much to him? Two days ago he might have described this feeling as simply a physical attraction, a longing to touch someone and she'd become that someone. Now now he was being ripped apart, and it was all his fault.

"I believe I put the wrong mark on your parchment," he said, his voice coming out stiffly. "If I could have it back for a moment?"

She stared sharply back at him before silently handed over the essay. He transformed the T into an O with his wand, and handed it back.

"Thank you." He had never known her to be so to the point, usually her endless ranting was enough to put him to sleep. She turned to leave, walking briskly over to the door.

He couldn't just let her go, couldn't let her leave on these terms. He took two long strides across the classroom. "Hermione?"

She turned around and looked up at him, those big brown eyes filled with confusion and what he took as a hint of anger. He rubbed irritably at his brow.

"I'm sorry for the other night. I'm sorry... sorry I called you... her." Merlin, he'd been reduced to using the 's' word.

Hermione briefly closed her eyes. "It's fine."

He reached out and lifted her chin, but her eyes shifted from him to the floor. He sighed and let her go. "It's not 'fine'. It's far from fine! You are my student, I am your professor! I shouldn't have... have done that!"

"No, probably not," she said, with a little shrug. "Perhaps it's best we just forget it."

How could she be so dismissive? Maybe he'd read her all wrong, maybe she really didn't care. Maybe she'd felt compelled to kiss him back out of a sense of duty to the Order, to her schoolwork, to any number of pathetic reasons that all amounted to her probably having found the entire experience utterly loathsome.

But as much as he wanted to, as much as he knew her advice was sound, he couldn't take it. He couldn't just forget that kiss, couldn't forget the way his traitorous body reacted, couldn't forget that it had been the most pleasant thing he'd experienced in years. And he couldn't forget how much he simply wanted *her*.

"If I made you uncomfortable, I apologise," he finally said, his arms falling to his sides in defeat.

"You didn't make me uncomfortable. I." She looked at him finally, seemed to be choosing her words carefully as her eyes scrutinised his, as if she was trying to get inside his mind. "I quite enjoyed it. But you're right, it was wrong."

She paused for a moment, and when he made no reply, she added, "I'm sorry." But something in her eyes told him different, something there screamed she wanted him just as badly. Why? Why would she want him? And why was she apologising to him as if she'd done something wrong?

Severus decided to stop thinking.

"Very wrong," he murmured in agreement, and even as the words left his mouth, he was bending down, lifting her chin again, pressing his lips against hers. So silky, so soft, so inviting. She tasted of breakfast, and that was quite all right by him. But he had to know, had to know he wasn't just taking advantage of his position. He released her mouth, dropping his kisses down to her neck.

"Hermione?" he asked against her bare skin.

"Mm?" The sound left her as a small moan and she tilted her head to allow him better advantage. And he took it, nipping at her neck, teasing her skin. Who would have thought Hermione Granger would be such a closet sensualist? Then again, he doubted anyone ever thought of him in such a light.

"Do you really want this? Do you really want me?" He braced himself for the answer. Even in his current position, drawing little murmurs from her as he kissed her neck, he fully expected her to say no.

She inhaled a deep, shaky breath. "Yes."

His heart leapt for a moment as her hands drifted across his back, but he quickly felt his hope sinking again as he once more made the mistake of thinking.

"But I'm old, I'm horrid" He paused, not wanting to admit to the last, but he never wanted a repeat of that night with Lily, never. "I'm a Death Eater."

"You're not that old," she said, her voice breathy, "and you're a spy, not a Death Eater."

He paused. "And as for the horrid part?"

She let out a laugh in reply that reverberated through him. "Well, I'm not arguing about that."

Severus pulled back and looked at her, her smile was contagious. He felt the corners of his mouth pulling up, felt the first real smile in... in a very long time. "Cheeky wench," he retorted.

She made him feel so comfortable, more comfortable than he had been since Lily. No, he was not going to think about Lily now. She was dead and gone. Why dwell on what can't be had when he had such a lithe, young, willing witch in his arms? And all the more, one who could keep up with his mind, who could make him smile. One he knew could have his heart, something Severus did not give away lightly. He moved to the other side of her neck, paying it the same attention as the first.

"I'm not a nice man, Hermione."

"I do have my own indiscretions... sir."

"Severus."

She paused, then spoke his name. "Severus." Oh, it sounded so lovely from her lips!

"Hermione Granger has her own indiscretions?" he said, trying to concentrate. "Staying out after curfew a few times does not count."

She paused. "You want the whole list? How about we stick to the things I've done to you?"

He pulled back from her and quirked an eyebrow. Things she'd done to him?

"I stole ingredients from your storeroom and brewed Polyjuice Potion in my second year."

So it had been her!

"I set fire to your robes in my first."

He tried to be angry at that, but he couldn't. Not with her here in his arms.

"Third, I laughed so hard I nearly cried when Neville's Boggart transformed into you wearing a green dress and a vulture-topped hat. Fourth year I called you a colourful array of obscenities when you commented, or should I say, failed to comment on my hexed teeth."

Damn, he remembered that.

"Fifth, I eavesdropped on you at Headquarters. And in my sixth year," she said shakily, tentatively running a hand over his chest, "I kissed you."

And she did. Rising up on her toes, she pressed her lips against his, and he let her take her own pace. She was tentative at first, simply brushing over his lips with her own, but soon her arms were around his neck, lips parted, tongue darting in and seeking out his. Her fingers felt so nice teasing the strands of hair at the nape of his neck, light and feathery touches that sent zings of electricity through him. Her mouth melded around his. Slowly, as she relaxed into him, her movements becoming more fevered.

Severus scooped her off the floor and, stumbling a little across the room, backed her up against the blackboard. His body pressed against hers, her legs wrapped around his waist pulling him closer. Again he could feel his erection throbbing against her. It wasn't just about that though, she made him happy, made him comfortable. Made him forget all his worries. Made the outside world disappear

"What is the meaning of this?!"

Severus tore his mouth from Hermione and looked back over his shoulder.

The Headmaster stood in the doorway.

Eyes wide, heart thumping, Severus took in the scene. He'd just been caught practically dry humping a student. No, not just a student, Hermione Granger, the smartest witch of her age, Gryffindor's golden girl and, not that it mattered to him, but to his associates, a Muggle-born. And to make matters worse, the Headmaster was not alone. Draco Malfoy was with him, his mouth hanging open in horror. Oh gods, he'd been caught kissing Gryffindor's resident know-it-all and Potter's ally. The Dark Lord would *Avada Kedavra* him, if he were lucky. He felt his world fall seemingly impossibly further apart.

Hermione struggled against him until she slid down the blackboard to her feet, where she pushed away from him, putting plenty of space between them, as if he'd burned her.

"Severus. My office. Now."

Severus couldn't remember the last time he'd seen the Headmaster so angry.

Dumbledore looked at Hermione. "I will speak to you later, Miss Granger."

Severus turned his face to stone, to his trained, impassive look.

"What on earth were you thinking, my boy? I had to Confund Malfoy!"

"Yes, sir."

"Well?"

"Well, well!" Severus stuttered. "I suppose you want me to promise it won't happen again?"

"That would be a start!"

"I can't do that. She makes me happy! Do you have any idea how long it has been since I was happy? Do you?" Severus spat accusingly.

"Happy does not factor into any of this. Once the war is over"

"Once the war is over I will be dead!"

"And what use will you be to her then?" Dumbledore bellowed. Then he leant back in his chair, his voice calming. "She's not Lily, Severus. All you are doing is confusing one intelligent young lady, one who needs all of her wits about her to help protect Harry. Do you not remember why you are protecting Harry?"

"For Lily," Severus said with a sigh. "I can't forget, I can never forget."

"Then leave Hermione be. Let her concentrate on helping Harry, she does not need the distraction."

Lily sat in the chair opposite Dumbledore's desk. She was worried. She could see the toll taken, could see the age in the old man's eyes, could see the way he cradled his blackened hand.

"And no one suspects anything?" Dumbledore prodded.

"No, sir," she said tensely.

"Then let us keep it that way."

"I don't see why we can't just tell him, I don't see why" Lily pleaded with him. Everything was all too complicated.

"Why? Because Severus has been set a task, Lily. One he must complete."

"But but he's falling for Hermione Granger!" Lily protested. "You saw him"

Dumbledore looked at her sternly. "Isn't Harry's survival more important than any sentiments you may have for Severus? Once the war is over"

"Once the war is over? This war is never over!" she screamed at him. He didn't reply, simply watched her. Defeated, she sunk back in her chair, fiddling nervously with her hair. "Sorry."

"Quite all right," Dumbledore said softly. "Lily, Severus must complete his task."

"What? You expect Severus to...to..." But she couldn't say it, could barely bring herself to think of her Severus as a murderer.

"Do what you can, Lily. Draco must not be seen to succeed. It must be Severus."

Lily sighed. "Why? Why can't I do it?" She looked at him and felt despicable. She'd just begged the old man to let her kill him, kill Dumbledore, the wizard who'd risked everything to save Harry. "It's just Severus, he's suffered so much"

"And this is his chance to redeem himself."

"How much more redemption does he need to seek? He's spent his life spying for you!"

"Yes. And he's spent his life protecting Harry for you," Dumbledore added quietly.

The painful truth tore through her. Lily closed her eyes. "All right. I will do what I can."

AN: Many hugs and kisses to my lovely beta :D

Chapter Thirteen

Chapter 13 of 18

COMPLETE! Hermione knows his secrets, his destiny unfulfilled. Snape sees only desolate dark. But in the tale of love and longing, Lily remembers everything.

All is not as it seems. The world of wizards is full of lies and half-truths.

Over twenty years ago, Severus Snape fell in love with Lily Evans, and he never stopped loving her. His every move, his every thought, is purely for her. And he has only one place, a room, hidden deep under the lake, where he can relax, not worry about whom he is spying on, what he should be saying and doing, where his loyalties lie. Somewhere he can reminisce about his childhood days there with Lily, to allow himself space to grieve.

That though, as with everything else, is about to change.

Chapter Thirteen

Severus stared at the note. He flipped the parchment over to check the back. Nothing. On the front there were just five simple words. The Three Broomsticks. Ten o'clock.

It certainly looked like Hermione's neat, precise writing, and a carefully placed Revealing Charm had failed to show up anything untoward, but one could never be too careful. Especially since Hermione had barely looked at him in three weeks. Three weeks she had seemed to disappear from the castle, except for classes. Not that she really seemed altogether 'there' in Defence Against the Dark Arts she sat, nose buried silently in her book, not looking at him, not looking at anyone. It made his heart ache, made him want her all the more.

It was now half after ten and the pub had only two occupants besides Severus; Madam Rosmerta herself and the rather odd smelling old bar keeper from the Hog's Head, who was nursing a drink at the bar. Nearing closing time on a Tuesday was apparently not affluent Butterbeer pouring time.

Severus picked up his own glass of Firewhisky and went to take a drink, wishing he had bought something stronger. She wasn't coming.

"Professor...Severus."

He felt rather than saw the warm hand that landed on his arm. He jumped, spilling his drink down the front of his robes and whipped out his wand, holding it steady before him.

"Shh!" came the harsh whisper.

He poked gently at the air before him. It said, rather indignantly, "Hey! Watch it!"

"Hermione?"

"Yes, who did you expect?" her voice whispered grumpily.

"Never" Severus stopped talking as he realised the publican was staring at him. Just what he needed, Madam Rosmerta spreading to all who would listen that Severus Snape had finally cracked and was talking to himself. He nodded at her and smiled weakly. Setting his half-empty glass back down on the table, he cast a Cleansing Charm on his robes. Then, under his breath, he muttered, "Outside. Now."

He saw the faint stirring of the day's debris on the floor as Hermione made her way to the door. Giving Rosmerta another nod, he made his way hastily from the pub, stopping to readjust his robes once he had the door open to give Hermione time to pass through.

"Merlin," Hermione's voice sounded from his left and he turned to face her, at least what he thought was her, "it's freezing!"

"Well then, why didn't you meet me somewhere warmer?" Snape suggested, a little sarcastically.

"I did! You were the one"

"You had Rosmerta thinking I was talking to myself!"

What was with this girl? Two kisses and she was berating him like they'd been married for years.

"Well, then, what do you suggest?" came the shrill reply.

"Firstly, that we go somewhere that I can see you what is that? Potter's Invisibility Cloak I presume?"

"Err..."

"Oh come now, Miss Granger, I'm all too aware that Potter inherited that rag from his father, it's not as if he has the talent to"

"Don't talk about Harry like that! He might not be brilliant at Potions, but he is certainly skilled at Defence Against the Dark Arts! And he is not just his father's son."

"He is every bit as arrogant"

He heard footsteps moving away from him. "Hermione!" he whispered harshly.

"I made a mistake, just leave me alone."

He rushed to catch up with her, flailing blindly in the thin air until his hand connected with something solid. "Please, let's go somewhere we can talk..."

"You've done quite enough talking!"

"Let me explain."

He heard her sigh. "Okay, fine."

Glancing around, he saw the distant shadow of the Shrieking Shack. "Come on."

Not letting go, but easing his grip on her, he led the way down to the derelict building. Dumbledore had said he'd removed the wards after placing new ones over the

Whomping Willow entrance to Hogwarts three years ago, but lately Severus had begun to doubt the Headmaster. Cautiously he tested them, and when nothing happened, he transfigured one boarded up window into a makeshift door. It wasn't the sturdiest looking of entrances, transfiguration had never been his thing, but it would suffice.

"Just foolish wand-waving," he thought he heard Hermione mutter.

"What?"

"Nothing," she said, a little too sweetly.

He really must have ticked her off. Merlin, she was an impertinent little whatsit, but still he wanted her. It wasn't as if anything had changed, she'd always been obnoxious in her own know-it-all way. He admired her for it, she wasn't a push over, which was something to be proud of, especially being a Muggle-born in these times.

He opened the door for her, stepped inside and closed it firmly behind them. It was a little lopsided in its frame, allowing scant slivers of moonlight to fall on the dusty floor.

"*Lumos!*" He lit the room with his wand just in time to see Hermione slipping out from under the cloak. The sight of her made his heart drum a little harder, and he hated and loved his reaction to her all at once.

She began rummaging through her pockets, finally pulling out an impossibly small vial. And inside was a bright blue flame.

"Where did you get that?" Severus' voice sounded angry even to his ears.

"I made it," she said with a grin. "I saw the one you had in the cave and it was fascinating! So I looked it up in the library..."

Severus relaxed. She hadn't stolen Lily's flame.

Hermione suddenly seemed to remember she was angry with him though, and cast him a scowl.

Hermione pulled the glass stopper from the vial and immediately the room warmed and soft light flooded them. It appeared they'd come into the sitting room.

Hermione waved her wand around the room, casting various cleansing spells before plopping down on the couch and folding her arms across her chest, nodding him towards the armchair. "You wanted to talk. So, talk," she demanded.

Severus froze midway to sitting at her harsh tone, raising one eyebrow at her. She glared right back. He felt as if their roles had been reversed, he was now the student being admonished by the admittedly slightly scary professor. Still, she held him there with her gaze, her intensity astounding him. He relented and sat down.

"I am never going to like Potter," he finally said.

She huffed in response.

"But I have tolerated him for six years, I can tolerate him a little longer."

"Why? Why do you even bother with him? If he irritates you that much!"

"You irritate me as well," he snapped, then found himself smiling. It quickly faded though. "I promised Dumbledore I'd protect him."

"Even though you hate him?"

"I...." Severus drew a deep breath. He didn't want to go into this now, didn't want to bring up Lily's memory, sitting here talking to Hermione it felt like being unfaithful to her. "It's complicated."

She went to speak but he cut her off with a harsh glare.

"Enough, Hermione. All you need to know is that your friend Potter is never going to be one of my favourites. It's just the way things are." She finally, reluctantly, nodded her head. "Now I want to know why you are sending me messages and sneaking out of the grounds in the middle of the night? It's not safe!"

"Because Dumbledore has eyes all over the castle and I wanted to see you."

"Dumbledore was less than pleased with you? His prize student?" Severus asked in surprise.

"He didn't leap for joy, if that's what you mean."

"I'm not worth risking your safety over," he reprimanded

"You haven't stopped me yet," Hermione retorted. And it was true, as cross and defensive as she was, he was enjoying her company.

"You do remember what happened to Miss Bell"

"I'm not a huge fan of tacky jewellery."

He gave her a harsh glare. "It's no joke!"

"I took precautions," Hermione said impatiently, jerking her head at the cloak on the end of the couch.

"Next time, meet me in the cave." Invisibility Cloak or not, he did not want her walking around out of the school grounds by herself. In fact, he'd rather she didn't walk around inside the school grounds alone either. In many ways he held her in the same regard as Lily; he so desperately wanted her and so desperately wanted to keep her safe. He shook his head.

"Next time?" Hermione's voice, quieter now, broke through his thoughts. "I would've thought Dumbledore would have you under threat of death."

Her words stung, bringing his upcoming task to the forefront of his mind.

He repeated her earlier words back to her. "He didn't leap for joy, if that's what you mean."

Her smile warmed him, made his forget everything for the moment.

"Well then, if Dumbledore's not happy, I should probably go." She spoke the words, but she made no move to leave.

"The Headmaster is under the impression that I will distract you from helping Potter."

"He doesn't give me much credit, does he? Besides," Hermione said, standing up and stepping across the room to lean down and whisper in his ear, "it's too late. You've been distracting me for quite some time."

Severus nearly groaned. How she could empty his mind in a matter of a few words was nothing short of amazing. If they could bottle this feeling, the war would be over in

a flash.

"Miss Granger," he said in his best Professor tone, "if you wish to finish this conversation I suggest you confine yourself to the couch."

"Forgive me," she said sweetly, "but here we are not subject to Dumbledore's prying eyes and I believe we can make better use of the time." Despite her self-assured words, he could see her visibly shaking. She was nervous.

He reached out and stroked her cheek. "You've got Gryffindor's courage, Hermione, I'll give you that."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"It means one day you'll wake up and regret that offer."

"The only thing I regret," she replied, toeing her way out of her shoes, slipping a knee either side of his thighs and lowering herself into his lap, "is not making the offer sooner."

Her presence momentarily distracted him, and he buried his hands in the mess of curls that was her hair and pulled her roughly to him, claiming her mouth with his. But as his body relished in her soft lips grazing his mouth, his tongue battling with hers, something nagged at his mind, diminishing his satisfaction. He broke away from her. Her fingers moved to the buttons of his cloak, but he halted them with the firm grip of his hands. "What about Potter? What about Weasley? I've seen them both with you."

She looked up curiously at him. "Ronald isn't exactly my type."

He raised an eyebrow at that, but, as she didn't elaborate, he didn't press the issue, content that she held no feelings for the boy. His first question remained unanswered though, and it bothered him. "And Potter?" She might not have heard it, but the slight hitch in his voice was definitely there.

"Harry?" she laughed. "Harry and Ron and even Ginny, they're like family to me!"

And her mouth was back on his, her fingers fighting against his grip to free his buttons.

"Hermione, I have to tell you so many things," he spoke breathlessly, but it needed to be said. Better for her to know now and leave than to find out later, when she had all of him, when it was too late. Perhaps it already was too late. "I've done so much, so many things I'm not proud of over the years..."

"That was then," she muttered against his Adam's apple as she kissed his throat.

He swallowed hard. "I have to do more."

"I'm sure, whatever it is, it's for the best." She was so dismissive of his Dark side; she shouldn't be! She had no idea who he was, who he really was, and yet here she was, pushing open his shirt, trailing her hands over his chest, making him moan in delight and anticipation. Then again, she'd seen his memories, she did know him. The worst of him.

"How did you get into the cave?" He didn't know where the question came from, but the moment it left his lips he realised it had been bothering him on a subconscious level since he'd found her there.

"I found the key."

"Where...." But he knew where he'd left it. Lily's grave. She must have gone there with Potter. With her insatiable mind she probably hadn't rested until she'd found the lock to which that strange, serpent key belonged.

"Shh," she whispered, silencing him with her index finger to his lips. "Another time."

He hesitated for a moment. They really should talk, they really should get everything out in the open. Then again, she was sitting in his lap, the warmth of her body heating his rapidly growing arousal and practically begging for him. Talking could wait. Taking couldn't.

He kissed the tip of her finger and she smiled. That smile, the one that lit up her face and sent a deep ache of longing through his body. He wanted her, he couldn't deny it. And he couldn't sit her letting her tell him what to do, he needed to take charge for his own sake.

Hoisting her from his lap, he carried her across the room, pinning her to the couch with his body.

"Last chance, Hermione." His dark eyes sought for an answer in hers, looking back at him, wide in surprise.

"I want you, Severus."

He kissed her hard, subtly be damned. Never taking his mouth off of hers he hastily stripped her of her shirt and bra. Pulling back, he took a moment to admire her. She was so youthful, so perfect. He didn't deserve her.

No, he deserved everything.

He dropped his mouth down to her nipple, capturing it lightly between his teeth before sucking it into his mouth. His tongue danced over the hard bud, flicking at it, as his hand possessed her other breast, driven on by his desire until she was lifting her back from the couch to meet him.

"Oh gods, yes!"

His hands slid down her body, tearing her skirt down. He paused only as his thumbs hooked over the waistband of her knickers. As much as he wanted to just take her, just thrust inside of her until he came, take out all his anger and frustration and desperate need to have her, it suddenly stuck him that she might not have done this before. That, in fact, she probably hadn't. He didn't want to hurt her.

"Severus," she whimpered, bucking her hips to urge him on. "Please."

"Have you ever...." No, that wasn't appropriate. And he didn't want to know. "I don't want to hurt you."

She stared up at him. "You won't."

He let go of her and she protested, but as he rid himself of the rest of his own clothing she fell silent, watching him both hungrily and shyly. She was certainly an enigma. His enigma.

Hermione reached out to stroke his exposed penis, but he batted her hand away. "Another time," and with those words he rid her of her knickers, pushed one of her knees up to her chest and thrust into her.

"Severus!"

Merlin, she was hot and so tight...maybe she'd been lying to him, maybe she had never done this before... but she didn't protest, quite the contrary. She clawed at his back, tugged at his hair urging him on. It was all he could do to hold off with her whimpering under him.

"Please, please," she begged. "Talk to me."

"Talk to you?" he huffed.

"Tell me.... Tell me how good it feels."

"Oh Merlin," he muttered. "It feels incredible, Hermione. You feel incredible. So slick, so hot, so tight...."

"I'm so close," she whispered.

"Hermione," he moaned. She was testing his control, and she was winning; he couldn't do it, couldn't hold off while she was beneath him proclaiming things like that. He silenced her with his mouth, kissing her with abandon, never relenting as he thrust into her. Propping himself up on his elbows, he found her nipples with his hands and squeezed them firmly.

He felt her body tighten around him, felt her muscles quivering in waves. She broke their kiss to cry out his name. "Severus!"

One simple word from her and it pushed him over the edge.

Severus awoke slowly, drifting in and out of consciousness for some time. It wasn't until someone coughed that his eyes sprung open. Someone was in his bed.

Lily!

No, Lily was dead.

This was not his bed, this wasn't even his room.

Hermione.

The night before rushed back to him as he became quite aware now of her warmth, of her hair tickling his nose where they lay, her back spooned against his front. Naked. So hot and soft against his chest. And his penis had slipped between her thighs. He was already hard. Almost painfully so. The skin of her inner thighs was like silk against the throbbing head of his erection. It wouldn't take much, just one small move and he could bury himself inside of her again.

Still, she appeared to still be asleep. He thought perhaps he should give her fair warning.

He slid one hand up her torso to her breast, gently cupping its weight before seeking out her nipple and rolling it between thumb and forefinger. Hermione moaned slightly, arching her back, pressing her shoulders more firmly against his chest, her backside into his abdomen. He trailed his other hand down her stomach until his fingers slid through her curly thatch of hair, delving further to seek out her folds. They were slick to his touch and that realisation had him longing to be in her even more. He sought out the hard nub of her clitoris, rubbing it gently with his finger.

"Severus..." His name came from her lips in a husky morning tone.

He could hold back no more. Grasping her leg he pulled it back over his, and rearranging his hips he felt the delightful sensation of her slick skin against his pulsing erection. He thrust forward, burying himself in her in one move. Holding her in place with his leg wrapped around hers he languidly slid almost out of her before rocking back in, over and over. He could feel the sweat forming between them, the sweet scent of sex filling the air again.

He sought out her clitoris, brushing over it with his thumb until she was whimpering, crying out his name. Her body shuddered around his, pulling him over the void into ecstasy.

In the aftermath, he gently stroked her cheek, but his mind was distant now. He should never have done this, never have bedded a student. She was innocent, she didn't deserve to be pulled into his world.

"That was quite a delightful way to be woken up," Hermione said with a laugh, turning to face him. Her face froze when her eyes met his, one hand anxiously pushing her hair back behind her ear. "What's wrong?"

"I have to kill the Headmaster."

Hermione stared back at him, then shook her head with a bitter smile. "Before I ask why, I must say, you really should work on your post-coitus conversational skills."

Lily sat on her pumpkin fizz box, just staring at the wall.

She'd lost him here all those years ago. And yes, in hindsight with everything she knew now, she'd been silly. But still, he was a Death Eater then, perhaps a naïve teenage Death Eater, but one nonetheless. And she'd been just a kid too.

But now... now she could have him back, really back. They'd both changed so much... but it was still there, that deep-seated connection she felt with him. She still loved him, always would.

But he was falling for Hermione.

And Dumbledore did not approve.

Stuff what Dumbledore thought! He was the one who'd put her in this mess!

And saved Harry, she reminded herself.

She sighed. Severus was happy. That would have to suffice. His happiness was what mattered; she owed him so much.

Lily left the cave. All of her. Except one, long, dark red strand of hair caught on a splinter of the pumpkin fizz box.

AN: hugs and big smooches to my lovely beta, otherwise known as my right arm ;)

Chapter Fourteen

Chapter 14 of 18

COMPLETE! Hermione knows his secrets, his destiny unfulfilled. Snape sees only desolate dark. But in the tale of love and longing, Lily remembers everything.

All is not as it seems. The world of wizards is full of lies and half-truths.

Over twenty years ago, Severus Snape fell in love with Lily Evans, and he never stopped loving her. His every move, his every thought, is purely for her. And he has only one place, a room, hidden deep under the lake, where he can relax, not worry about whom he is spying on, what he should be saying and doing, where his loyalties lie. Somewhere he can reminisce about his childhood days there with Lily, to allow himself space to grieve.

That though, as with everything else, is about to change.

Chapter Fourteen

Lily's hair, still in the breezeless room, waited days before the door finally opened again. It quivered as a black cloak brushed it aside then swept it out onto the floor next to the ebbing blue flame. It rolled on the uneven flags and was almost lost in the dark recesses of the cave. But it was picked up at the very last moment, pinched harshly by long fingers, studied by piercing, obsidian eyes. Turned over, held to the light.

Deep red, long... it had to be Lily's. The thought shook Severus, gripped his chest, restricted his breathing.

So many emotions....

Just touching this mere remnant of her brought back everything, every moment they'd spent together, the good and... and the not so good.

Dumbfounded, he settled down on his pumpkin fizz box, twirling the hair, winding it through his fingers, remembering what it had been like to hold her close he could almost smell her.

But it couldn't be. Surely he would have seen it, noticed it before now. Merlin knew he spent enough time down here feeling confused and sorry for himself.

Yes, confused and sorry for yourself and not paying the slightest bit of attention, you fool.

Pulling an empty vial out of his cloak pocket, he carefully placed the hair inside, handling the precious hair as if it were made of glass, as if it would shatter at any moment.

Holding the vial up to the light, he continued to stare at it, mesmerised, turning it this way and that. It was Lily's. His love.

The length of the strand bothered him. Perhaps she had come back there after they had left Hogwarts? The last time he'd seen her in Knockturn Alley her hair had been almost to her waist. A torturous thought stabbed at his heart. If only she'd said yes that day, if only she'd come away with him, life would have been so different.

Yes, you'd probably be dead as well, you fool.

Reality came crashing down on him.

He did still love Lily, loved her so intensely he was worshipping a single strand of her hair. He would have tormented anyone else who dared to do such a thing, sneered so long and hard they would have run from him and never returned. He'd done it to Tonks, mocked her Lupin-like Patronus.

A thought struck him. Hit him as hard as a Bludger to the back of his head. That thought was of Hermione.

How could he keep fooling himself like this? More importantly, how could he keep deceiving Hermione with this charade of his, with the pretence that he was willing to love her when his heart belonged to another? He would never be over Lily. That thought was ludicrous. He'd spent almost his entire life living and breathing just for her.

Still, he longed for Hermione in a way he couldn't explain. He hated the thought of her spending time with Weasley and Potter, he needed to protect her....

She was like Lily. He felt the same way for Hermione as he'd felt for Lily the very first time he'd seen her. That was so long ago, they'd been just children, but he remembered as if it were yesterday.

But that wasn't yesterday, it was over twenty-five years ago. Lily was now dead. The wistful fog of memories receded and his reality became very clear. Hermione, she could never be his Lily, but she made him happy, happier than he'd been in years, she made this whole living nightmare have a point. She was something worth fighting for. Something more solid, more real than the wispy memories of Lily.

Something, *someone*, more tangible than a long red hair dropped into a Potions test tube.

But could he love Hermione as well? Was it possible to love two women?

Perhaps. Certainly, he didn't think he felt as intensely for Hermione as he did for Lily, but then he'd had quarter of a century obsessing over Lily, no one was likely to simply wander into his life and live up to that. But the desire for Hermione was there, growing with each passing day.

Not that it mattered, it was only a matter of time before everything would come crashing down around his ears, before he would be forced to do Dumbledore's bidding one last time.

That train of thought angered him. Finally, finally he'd found some happiness and now that was to be destroyed as well.

Why should he keep fighting this war, why should he be the martyr? He could be happy with Hermione, he knew he could. All he had to do was to convince her to leave, to go into hiding with him, to make her listen to reason. He hadn't tried hard enough with Lily, hadn't fought against everyone else hard enough and look what had happened? No, this time he would find his peace, fight for it and not take no for an answer. He would take Hermione away, the rest of the wizarding world be damned.

Out of habit, he tucked the glass vial absently away in his pocket and set off to find her.

"Miss Granger."

She looked up from her book. She was back in the library. Goodness knows where she'd been the rest of the day, because he'd been in here so many times, walking in the

door and then back out, that even Madam Pince had asked if he was all right. She'd received the patented sneer in return for her nosiness.

It was comforting to find everything as normal, Hermione surrounded by piles of books, a quill in one hand, minute notes jotted on the scrap of parchment before her. As ever, she, like Lily before her, was convinced the answer to everything lay inside the covers of a book. Unfortunately, as of yet, she'd been unable to find which book it was that solved all of Severus' woes.

"I need to speak with you." He tried to make it sound menacing, so prying ears wouldn't wonder at his sudden softness towards Hermione, but his heart wasn't in it. He just wanted her, wanted her away from here now, in his arms where they could forget about everything but each other. "Immediately."

She gave him a concerned look, but she packed up her things all the same.

"Yes, sir."

He turned, but as he left he was caught under the stern, disapproving gaze of Madam Pince. He didn't like that look. He'd been caught. His heart hammered and he tried to push the dread of reprimand aside. What did it matter? He and Hermione wouldn't be around long enough for Dumbledore to hear he'd singled her out. Still, something made him add, in his harshest tone, brought on by the librarian's scowl, "Hurry up, Miss Granger. Those filthy cauldrons won't clean themselves."

Madam Pince's disgusted scowl turned from Severus to Hermione and, though he felt bad about it, it was far better she think her daily visitor had earned detention than go running to Dumbledore with her thoughts.

He headed for the cave. She would follow in a while, as she always did. It was safer that way.

Severus spent the several minutes alone in the cave doubting himself, doubting if he should do this, if he should make such a selfish decision, but he always came back to the same conclusion. He'd done enough, he deserved this. Running away was for Hermione's safety, that clinched it for him. When it came down to it, he had no choice.

"What's wrong?"

He raised an eyebrow at her. "Nothing is wrong. Everything is right."

He pulled her into his arms, inhaling the scent of her hair, memorising it, trying to wash away the smell of Lily. It was working, and it should. Hermione was here, Lily was gone.

He bent down and kissed her.

"As much as I'm enjoying this, and I'm more than happy if you simply called me down here to have your way with me, Severus, you did say you needed to speak to me."

"I would hardly have said to the entire library I needed to worship your body," his fingers trailed down her bare arms, "kiss you senseless," his lips teased softly against hers as he spoke, "thrust into you until you cried my name," he ground his hips into hers, leaving her with no doubt as to how aroused he was, "now would I?"

"I... I suppose not," she replied, her voice breathy as she tipped her head, letting him nip at her neck.

"But you're right, I do need to speak to you. And I want you to listen, very carefully, before making a decision." Reluctantly, he pulled away from her. The sooner they left, the better. There would be all the time in the world for making love to her then.

She quirked her head at him in confusion, but nodded in agreement all the same.

He nodded her at the pumpkin fizz box and sat down across from her. "I'm tired of all this. I'm tired of fighting for everyone else, I'm tired of losing everything I ... I love."

She watched him curiously, but nodded at his declaration. She didn't interrupt though, kept her promise to hear him out.

"I want you to leave with me. We will go somewhere else, somewhere safe. Somewhere no one can find us. Please, Hermione, please say you will."

He was so desperate for her to say yes he would have dropped to his knees and begged if he'd thought it would help.

She looked intensely at him and then sighed. "I thought something like this might be coming."

It wasn't the answer he'd been hoping for, but it wasn't a no. "You did?"

"Hagrid said something interesting today. He told Harry and I," Severus bit back the jealousy he felt at hearing she'd been with Potter, "that you told Dumbledore he took too much for granted, that you didn't want to do it anymore."

"How did Hagrid hear that?" Severus snapped.

"He overheard you. Don't worry, he has no idea what it's about."

"Of course he doesn't, the great oaf!"

Her hand came to rest on his arm. "The more I research, the more I realise the solution, Severus. You have to do it. You have to do as Dumbledore asks."

"Asks? He's hardly asking me!" No, no, no! This wasn't going to plan at all! His anger bubbled in his veins, his vision blurred red. Damn it, damn them all!

"You have to do it. For Dumbledore, for Harry, for Draco, for the entire wizarding world. For yourself."

"How is killing the Headmaster *for myself*?" he snapped, standing up and stalking the length of the cave.

"Because it will keep Voldemort happy."

"What the hell would you know?!" He yelled at her with all of his anger, all of his frustration. And she let him, standing there calmly just letting him vent. Finally he stopped and really looked at her. She was so good to him, too good. Putting his head back in his hands he muttered, "I'm sorry."

"Don't be." She bent down and kissed him gently. "But you know we can't just run away. The Unbreakable Vow will kill you. And they'll hunt us down wherever we go. We would spend our lives looking over our shoulders, afraid. I don't want to live like that, I don't want to live knowing I've abandoned my friends, left them to die at Voldemort's whim. And neither do you."

She was right. Damn her for always being right.

"I love you, Severus Snape," she told him, brushing his hair from his face. "And whatever you decide, I'll stand by you. But by gods, if you sacrifice yourself for nothing, I won't ever forgive you."

And she turned and left.

She'd said he had to kill Dumbledore. His destiny decided by the young woman with the toothy smile that had told him she loved him.

Loved him.

He pinched at his nose again, wondering if there was a bed available on Ward 49 of St. Mungo's.

The next few months passed far too quickly for Severus' liking. Between teaching, keeping Malfoy on track, perfunctory Death Eater meetings, and Weasely-infested Order meetings, he and Hermione had very little time together. But that was all right, it made the stolen moments with her all the more meaningful.

As time went by Voldemort grew increasingly powerful. Severus had felt more and more useless with each passing day.

But he'd kept Hermione safe, he'd managed that at least.

One dark night in late spring that all ended. It was over as soon as the Mark was cast over the turrets of Hogwarts. No one was safe, not anymore because he'd done it. He'd killed the Headmaster.

Dumbledore.

Albus.

The one person who'd given him a second chance.

He sat on the tatty couch of his childhood home, curtains drawn, staring at the peeling paper on the wall. It was dark; he hadn't bothered to light the candles as night had closed in. He felt numb. He tried not to think. It wasn't working.

Hermione might have said she understood, that she knew he had to do as Dumbledore said. But she wouldn't come back to him. Who would want a murderer? Certainly not a girl like Hermione.

The pleading in Albus' eyes right before he'd killed him haunted Severus. He tried shutting his eyes to block the memory out, but it lingered there, burnt into his mind. Even his troubled sleep brought no reprieve.

It was wrong. All wrong.

He heard the knock on his front door and ignored it. He didn't want to speak to anyone, friend or foe. But in time he heard the soft click of the door opening. He hadn't bothered warding the door. The sooner the Aurors came and cast the Killing Curse on him, the better.

"Severus?"

She sat down gently on the couch, her hand tentatively touching his arm.

"Leave, Hermione. Leave and never come back. You don't deserve this, you don't deserve me." He pushed her hand away, standing up, trying to put some space between them, trying to escape from her.

She stood from the couch but made no move closer. "Sev, come on."

Lily would call him 'Sev'. This was too much to bear. He'd lost them both. He bit back his tears and roared at her.

"Just leave. Leave and don't ever come back." He looked up at her and his voice quavered as he saw her. "I don't deserve you. I killed him."

The tears won. They spilt down his cheeks, and this time he didn't push her away as she wrapped her arms around him.

"You did what you had to," she said, her voice wavering a little, but he heard her sniff back the tears.

"It doesn't make it any easier."

She didn't tell him it would all be all right. How could she? The Headmaster was dead and Merlin knew what would happen now.

He wept into her hair for a while, holding her close. His mood began to change, from self-pity to anger. Why him? Why should he have to suffer? What had he ever done? One silly mistake as a teenager and look at him now! But he had Hermione, if only temporarily. He had her warmth against him, her arms around him. He kissed her desperately, wanting to drown himself in her, to forget everything. He pulled her hard against him, never wanting to let go. And she kissed him back, letting him know she was there for him.

He backed her up against the wall, pinning her there with his body. He had lost control, the past day had left him drained, but this, this he needed. He clawed at her clothes, desperately pulling them from her body as his kiss intensified, his lips bruising hers. Hermione struggled back, releasing all the shirt buttons she could reach, the rest trapped between them. She gave up, instead pulled his shirttails from his too-tight trousers, then reached for his belt. She fumbled, unable to undo the buckle in such a hurry.

"This is ridiculous," Severus muttered, pulling his wand from his pocket and vanishing their clothes.

Her warm skin met his, sending an involuntary bolt through him, the first real feeling he'd had for a long time. Her hands wandered his shoulders, teased the hair on his chest. His lips captured her neck, his kisses hungry, intense. She'd have marks there later, but right now, it didn't matter. He needed this.

He didn't bother with frivolities, not now. Instead, he pulled her from her feet, trapping her against the cold wall with his hips. She cried out in surprise, then moaned in delight as his already erect cock pressing against her folds, her skin silken against his pulsing erection. Merlin, how he needed her.

She seemed to know, seemed to need it too, if the way her body rocked against his, the way she was moaning was anything to go by. Grasping her hips, he lifted her a little higher, positioning her where he needed her, the head of his cock resting just outside her entrance, leaving her there, breathing hard.

"Fuck me, Severus," she begged.

He grunted, shoving his hips upwards, pulling her down onto him at the same time. He filled her completely with that one, swift movement.

She cried out, clawing at his shoulders. Hermione's head fell back, hitting the wall with a dull thud. Sensations washed through him with such explosive intensity... it was madness. Nothing should feel this good... not after.... But no, he needed this, he deserved it and he was damned if he was letting memories, damned memories, ruin it for him.

He didn't give her long to recover. Pulling his hips back he began a relentless rhythm, pounding into her, never letting up. And she clung to him, allowing him to take out every frustration he had with each move.

His mouth dropped to her neck again, exposed to him as it was, kissing her skin, nipping at it.

"Sev, please," she begged him. And his eyes fell closed.

Sev she'd called him. Lily. He was fucking Lily again.

He groaned, his movements suddenly intensified against his will.

Lily.

He felt her body clamping down around him, drawing him in deeper and deeper until waves of pleasure washed through him and she finally dragged him over with her.

Part of him wanted to hold her, to stay with her, to reveal in the aftermath, but he couldn't. He pulled out and let her slide down the wall to the floor. Standing there, on wavering legs, she stared after him.

"Severus?" she called, pushing herself up right with her palms against the wall.

"L" Cold guilt placed icy fingers on his shoulders. This was Hermione and he'd allowed himself to fantasise she was Lily. For the longest moment she had seemed.... "Leave," he said, shrugging guilt off and covering for his slip of the tongue. He gathered her crumpled clothes from the couch and shoved them at her.

"Wh...What? Severus?" she said, standing their stupidly holding her clothes. She reached out one hand to touch his arm, but he pulled it away.

"Don't touch me, Hermione. Just go."

She ignored him. Instead she reached up to touch his face. He winced. It felt like her touch burnt him, but he didn't pull away. His arms moved around her pulling her close. She smelt of him, of sweat, of sex. It was such a delightful smell, something he didn't want to ever leave.

"I'm so sorry," he pleaded against her hair. "It's not you. It's.... I can't explain. I'm so sorry, Hermione."

She grasped his head with her hands, pulling his face up. He's cheeks were wet.

"What on earth for?"

"For my past. For ghosts I cannot lay to rest. For a vial I can never throw away. For a moment's madness. For tonight. For taking it out on you.... I should've been more careful, I...."

She looked confused for a moment, then an amused smile touched her lips. "Sex doesn't all have to be romantic," Hermione replied.

"What have I become?" he asked her, searching her eyes.

She smiled at him. "You have become one very brave man," she told him sincerely. "And a smelly one at that," she added, giving him a grin. "Come on, I'll join you in the bath."

Severus had never had such an enjoyable soak in all his life. It wasn't that they'd made love again, no. They just sat there, her leaning back against his chest, listening as he poured out everything to her. And she'd even shed a tear or three with him as he'd told of having to kill the Headmaster, of him begging Severus to.

And she'd just listened, hadn't said a word. Hadn't needed to, he just needed someone to talk to, someone he didn't need to put his guard up against.

After the bath, Severus felt much lighter, as if the bubbles had washed away a lot of his terror. As he handed her a towel afterwards, he turned to her, murmuring thank you on her lips, then kissed her. Softly, so gently... And he hadn't stopped there, he'd caressed each breast, traced his long fingers down her sides, and was just making his way past her belly button when her stomach let out a loud rumble.

A smile crept onto his face, but the moment was broken.

She'd laughed and apologised.

"It's quite all right, I don't think I've eaten in days," Severus said.

She gave him a concerned look. "I'll go see if I can fix us up something," she told him, heading for the bathroom door.

"There's not much here," he said, placing a hand on her arm to stop her for a moment. He'd wrapped a towel around her as she stood there. He couldn't bear the thought of her walking around naked, where someone might see her. She was his Hermione, as silly as it seemed after he'd been the one to vanish her clothes earlier in the lounge.

"I'll see what I can brew up," she told him, heading off down to hall.

He watched her as she walked away, smiling gently. It was all right, she made it all right to smile.

She turned and looked him over. "Why do you get to wander around naked?" she demanded.

"Because," he lied to her, "I'm not sure I could control myself seeing you without clothes on."

"Well then...." She reached for the knot of her towel.

"No," Severus said quickly. He'd taken enough of her. For now. "Food first, Hermione. I don't want you passing out on me."

She laughed, the sound lightening his heart, and disappeared down the hall.

Severus made his way to his room and sat down on the bed. The mixed feelings running through him left him confused. He should feel terrible, more than terrible, wretched, but there he was, smiling like a fool.

Maybe being a fool wasn't so bad after all.

The knock on the front door resounded through the house. Severus stood and made his way to the window, peering down into the dark front yard. All thoughts of happiness, of peace left him, draining his skin of the little colour he had.

Bolting down the hallway, dressing himself quickly with his wand, he burst into the kitchen.

"No wonder you're so thin, there's nothing in here," Hermione chided him as she pulled cupboard after empty cupboard open.

"He's here...you've got to go. You've got to go now!"

He waved his wand over her, dressing her.

"Who's here?" she turned around, looking up at him with those wide eyes. They'd be the death of him. Soon. Too soon.

"The Dark Lord. And two Death Eaters."

"What is he...?"

"Come to congratulate me on extraordinary work, I don't doubt," Severus replied bitterly.

Hermione reached for him, her mouth moving to say something but nothing came out.

"Please, just go!" Severus begged. Why was she still here? He would kill her!

Hermione looked at him, her brow knitted. But she did as he asked, Apparating away with a crack.

Lily watched from across the street feeling helpless.

Dumbledore was dead. By Severus' hand. He'd actually done it. She didn't know what to think. On one hand, he'd had to, she knew he did, that he had no choice and certainly he hadn't done it easily.

On the other, she was now alone. No one knew she was here any more. And Severus' safety was at risk; he could soon be gone as well. She couldn't just sit here feeling sorry for herself, not when he could be hurt. Or worse.

But her presence would put him in even more danger.

Lily rested her forehead against the cold brick wall and wept. She cried for herself, for Severus, for everyone, for the hopelessness of it all.

Nothing would be the same again, not now Dumbledore was dead.

AN: Hugs and Lattes to my darling beta :)

Chapter Fifteen

Chapter 15 of 18

COMPLETE! Hermione knows his secrets, his destiny unfulfilled. Snape sees only desolate dark. But in the tale of love and longing, Lily remembers everything.

All is not as it seems. The world of wizards is full of lies and half-truths.

Over twenty years ago, Severus Snape fell in love with Lily Evans, and he never stopped loving her. His every move, his every thought, is purely for her. And he has only one place, a room, hidden deep under the lake, where he can relax, not worry about whom he is spying on, what he should be saying and doing, where his loyalties lie. Somewhere he can reminisce about his childhood days there with Lily, to allow himself space to grieve.

That though, as with everything else, is about to change.

Severus waited in silence. It was now July.... When had he last seen her? A month ago? Two? It felt like a lifetime since he'd held Hermione in his arms.

Maybe she wasn't coming? Maybe she hadn't received his owl? Maybe something had happened to her? Oh gods, maybe she was dead.

He'd tried to find her. He had attempted to find a contact address for her through the school files, but, when he arrived at her London home, her parents were gone and none of the neighbouring Muggles knew where they were. At one point he'd even contemplated asking Dumbledore's portrait for information on Hermione, but quickly dismissed the idea. The former Headmaster, though now only a moving image on his office wall, could certainly still cause trouble for him if he were to think Severus was still seeing Hermione. That had been the end of his options. No one else leaked him information anymore, they thought he truly was a Death Eater, that he'd been working against them for years. And who could blame them? He had, after all, killed Albus.

He was a murderer; murder being just another despicable act to add to his burgeoning repertoire of despicable acts. The Headmaster's death weighed him down, suffocated him, almost as much as Hermione's absence did.

Some word of Hermione... anything that gave him hope... would have been nice, it would have helped ease his burden, but there was nothing, not even a reply to the owl he'd sent her two days ago requesting her help. Her lack of response was to be expected; he knew that, flippant communication was a risk not worth taking, but the silence still left him empty.

When the door to the cave finally creaked open and Hermione stood before him, safe and well, Severus was overwhelmed with relief. Jumping to his feet, not caring as water splashed on the hem of his robes, he wrapped his arms around her, pressing his lips gently to her forehead.

"I've missed you," he whispered, holding her tightly.

"I... I thought you were dead," she said against his chest, damp patches seeping through his shirt to his chest. She was crying.

He pulled back, brushing her cheeks with his hands, as if wiping away her tears would erase all the pain. If only fixing everything was that easy. "I couldn't contact you. I couldn't risk it." He held her tight again, letting her know he wished he had been able to tell her everything was fine. He wished he could now, but she would never hear those words. Nothing was fine.

"Why now, then? Why risk it now? What's wrong?" Hermione's voice wavered as she lifted her head from his chest to look up at him.

Severus took his time answering. He didn't want to put this on her, didn't want to place her in any further danger, but there was no choice, not if Dumbledore's portrait was to be believed. "The Dark Lord knows Potter is going to be moved. It has to happen before he turns eighteen. Before his aunt's protection wears out."

"And...?" Hermione's eyes searched his, as if trying to find the answer there.

"And the Dark Lord wants to know when." His words hung heavily in the damp air. He was asking so much of her, asking her to give up Potter's whereabouts to the Dark Lord, her friend she'd almost died trying to save on so many occasions.

Hermione looked up at him, eyes wide. "You're going to tell him?!"

Severus briefly closed his eyes. "I have no choice."

She jumped back from him, as if he'd burnt her, as if he were pure evil.

"Hermione, no! I won't let him harm Harry," he assured her, disconcerted by her reaction. He couldn't lose her now, not ever, but especially not when she was the only thing he had left. "But the Dark Lord must know when. If I don't tell him, he will know something is wrong. Dumbledore and I, we've come up with a plan."

Severus saw the hopeful expression on Hermione's face, and wondered at it for just a moment. "His portrait and I."

"Oh, his portrait. Of course." He saw her face fall and internally berated himself for giving her false hope. "What were you doing in the Headmaster's office?"

So she didn't know that the Dark Lord had taken control of Hogwarts. Severus swallowed the lump in his throat to tell her. "He has seen fit to appoint me to the position of new Headmaster."

"He?" Hermione squeaked.

"The Dark Lord."

The terror passed over Hermione's face for a moment. He could almost see her brain working, running through scenarios, figuring out the conclusions. Finally, she smiled. "Well, that's okay then. With you in charge, the school will be fine."

Though her trust in him was inspiring, it left a bitter taste in his mouth. "Don't be so certain. I'm not his only member of staff."

The concern furrowed her brow again. "You have to protect the students, you have to..."

"I have already promised Albus that I will do everything I can." Severus meant every word of it; he would do everything in his power to keep the student population safe from the Carrows and any other monsters the Dark Lord sent their way. He might not like the little brats very much, but he certainly did not want to see any of them dead. Well, not very many of them anyway.

Hermione sighed, then drew in a deep breath. "Saturday. That's when they'll be moving Harry."

Severus nodded in gratitude at her trust in him with such vital information. "I'm going to convince Mundungus that the Order needs to use decoys. Polyjuiced Potters. Mundungus is the only one I can risk Confunding. If that doesn't work"

"I'll make sure they know," Hermione replied with a nod.

He stepped forward, holding her again. "I wish I could stay..."

"I know," Hermione replied, laying her head against his chest. "Please, Severus, be careful."

"Never mind me, you take care."

He kissed her once more, then walked heavy-heartedly out the room.

"Wait!"

He turned back at her call, hoping she'd come up with a solution, that she had an answer to make all this horror vanish.

"Take this," she said, pressing a coin into his palm.

He looked down at the Galleon, scrutinising both sides of it. There was nothing out of the ordinary about the coin. "What is it?"

"A Galleon," she said with a grin.

"Very funny." Though he replied drolly, her humour lessened the massive weight bearing down on him. It was all right to laugh, just a little.

"It has the Protean Charm placed on it," she said, sounding quite proud of herself. "We can communicate."

"Hermione, this is dangerous, if it were to fall in the wrong hands...." As much as he would love to hear from her, to know she was all right, the knowledge of her safety was not worth the risk of someone else locating her.

"They will see it as simply a Galleon."

He nodded. "Very well." He kissed her gently once more and headed off up the tunnel.

Though Hermione did send the odd message to Severus via the Galleon, her words were never much. He knew the briefness was necessary, even with all her charms and protections on the coins, anything too detailed would be far too risky. No locations were ever given, no names, nothing that could implicate either of them.

It wasn't until the end of August that Severus met with her again. He was worried; no one had seen her. Neither her, or Potter, or Weasley had been sighted since they'd absconded from the Burrow. Her messages confirmed she was still alive, and according to her, 'fine', but that was all. Anything could have happened and here he was playing Headmaster. The thought clenched at his guts. But when he awoke one morning and found a date and time etched into the Galleon, he felt somewhat better.

"We have to get into the Ministry," she said urgently the moment she stepped into the cave.

"Hello to you too," he replied, raising an eyebrow. She was looking a little worse for wear, her hair was back to its bushy state from when she was a first year, and she looked thinner.

"Harry, Ron and I. We need to get into the Ministry."

"Why?"

"The Head of the Muggle-born Registration Commission possesses something we need."

Severus paused. He didn't want her going there, didn't want her putting herself in more danger. She was Muggle-born! If she were caught, they would snap her wand. No, they would do more than that; she would never go with them peacefully. The idea of Dementors surrounding his Hermione, taking her very soul... it didn't bear thinking about. Then again, he knew her. She would find a way in anyway, whether he helped her or not. Perhaps, with his help, she would have a better chance.

He pulled out quill and ink, taking the parchment she held rolled her hand, and drew her the best map of the Ministry that he could. He was no surveyor, but he thought the map was fairly thorough. He told her all the quirks of Ministry, the best time to get in, the best place. He wished he had more to give her, wished he had a foolproof plan for her, but he had told her all he knew.

"Thank you," she said, her eyes welling up as he rolled up the finished map and handed it to her.

"What's wrong?" he asked, brushing an errant tear from her cheek.

"Is this ever going to be over?" she asked, pleaded with him, as if it were in his power to end the war.

He sighed and held her close. "I hope so. I really hope so."

"They say you sliced off George's ear. They say you murdered Dumbledore. They all hate you."

Severus bristled. "It was an accident. I was trying to get Mulciber. He was going to kill Lupin."

"I will clear your name, Severus. As soon as this war is over, everyone will know what a hero you are."

She thought so highly of him, held him in such great regard. He didn't deserve such respect. "I'm no hero, Hermione. I'm just a fool."

She stepped closer to him, pressing her lips to his. "I don't fall in love with fools, Severus."

"How long do you have before you have to get back?" Severus asked tentatively as he held her in his arms once more.

"I've got a few hours," she whispered. "Harry and Ron think I'm spying outside the Ministry."

Her words were all he needed to hear.

He caught her up in his arms, transforming the pumpkin fizz boxes into a bed. Carefully he lifted her from her feet, and placed her on the mattress. Her hands teased his body, drifting over his skin, slowly undressing him. And he did the same to her, soaking up every inch of her, memorising her body, loving every part of her, just...just in case. He didn't allow himself to dwell on why, he didn't want to.

He made love to her slowly, taking his time, allowing her to enjoy every moment, bringing her to orgasm and joining her, her tears splashing against his face. A feeling of bitter sweetness filled him, and he wasn't sure if it was the memory that the last time he'd been this intimate with her had been just after ... after Dumbledore had passed, or if it were the thought of things to come, that this could be the last time.... No, he wouldn't think like that, wouldn't allow it.

But as he lay with her in his arms afterwards, holding her tightly as if there would be no tomorrow he couldn't help but to hope the dawn would never come.

More time passed, the days running into each other, his time spent making one attempt to protect the students after another, all the while feeling half-empty without Hermione.

Dumbledore had been trying for weeks to locate Hermione. Well, to locate Potter, but Severus assumed Hermione was alongside him and she was what mattered to him. He'd thought about using the Galleon, about asking her where they were, but the risk outweighed the rewards, and Dumbledore would want to know where he had received his information.

Finally, Phineas Nigellus found them, bigoted old crackpot that he was, and more importantly, he had heard Hermione's voice. Oh, her voice, what he wouldn't have given to hear one of her verbatim speeches taken straight from one of her precious textbooks right then.

As he grasped Gryffindor's Sword, making his way out of the grounds of the castle to Disapparate, the knowledge that he would be so close to her ate away at him, until, as he Apparated into the Forest of Dean, he knew he had no choice but to go to her.

The risks were there, but with Potter off chasing his Patronus, he couldn't stop himself. Somehow the knowledge that his Patronus was still a doe, still Lily's, made him all the more determined to see Hermione. He worried that he was forgetting her, that she was slipping through his fingers. She had been out here for who knew how long with Potter and Weasley, alone with Potter and Weasley.

A horrible sense of history repeating itself settled in his chest. His love and Potter together.

"Severus?"

It was a whisper caught on the breeze, but he turned his head and saw the vague ruffle of air, then a delicate disembodied hand waving on its own. He hurried over.

"Quick," she insisted. "Inside."

Before his eyes a tent appeared. Hermione's stood there, holding the door flap open for him.

"What the hell are you doing?" Severus demanded. "Where are your wards? Where is your wand? Anybody could wander in here! Anyone!"

"No, only Harry, Ron, you and me. Where's Harry?"

He ignored her. "Are you all right? Where's Weasley?"

"Ronald has seen fit to desert us," she replied bitterly. "Apparently saving the wizarding world is too much like hard work for him."

"Where is your wand?" he demanded, slightly relieved to hear that Weasley had left. The more distance between his Hermione and that Weasley boy, the better.

"Harry has it."

"Why the hell does Potter have it? You mean you're here alone, unarmed? Are you mad?!"

"I think this war has made everyone just a little mad, Severus," she said with a hint of a smile. "And Harry has it because he was standing guard and I was sleeping."

"And he's run off and left you here with no wand? I swear..."

Hermione gave him a strange look. "Where is Harry, Severus?"

Severus shook his head. "He will be back soon."

"Where is he?" she asked again, more urgently.

"Gaining the help of the great Godric Gryffindor. He will be fine," Severus told her dismissively. He wouldn't tell her Potter was off chasing his Patronus, his Lily's Patronus. "What I need to know is how you are. You're not hurt?"

She turned away from him, straightening out the blanket on one of the bunks. "I'm fine." Something in her voice betrayed her though, just the slightest of wavers that hitched her tone.

"What is it?" he demanded.

"Nothing, I'm fine."

"Hermione," he said harshly, turning her around to look at him. Something was wrong, something was dreadfully wrong. "Tell me."

"There's nothing to tell!" she insisted, trying to move past him.

He had to know she was okay, nothing else mattered. "Don't make me use it! Don't make me!" he yelled, and his mind started prickling at hers, delving into her thoughts of its own accord.

"Stop!" she yelped like he was hurting her, backing away from him. "Stop! All right, I'll tell you!"

Severus pulled himself back, just as a flicker of a memory lingered in his mind. Her, Harry and Ron, back when she was a lot smaller, probably their first year, looking guiltily up at his glowering form in one of the courtyards of the castle. They had all shuffled closer together, hiding something behind their backs.

He looked at her, waiting.

"I'm pregnant."

He blinked. "What?"

"I'm pregnant." She slumped down on the cot in defeat.

To say that hadn't been what he'd expected would have been the understatement of the century. "With my..."

"Yes with yours," she bit back angrily. "What do you think I am?"

That last time, it must have been then. That would make her five months pregnant. Gods, she'd been running around out here with Potter and Weasley, five months pregnant with his child. What sort of a man was he? She should have been taking it easy, she should have been tucked up in a nice house somewhere knitting baby clothes. He was pathetic. Worse than pathetic. Five months pregnant... he had to admit, her Concealment Charm was working well.

"This has to be a joke!"

"Do you see me laughing?" she said bitterly.

His eyes wandered the tent, looking everywhere but at her. He tried to get his mind to think, tried to process what she was telling him, but he couldn't focus.

The blue flame in the jar in the corner caught his eye, and a vague memory from years ago came to him. It was the same one he'd seen just now as he'd dove into her thoughts. First year Hermione, Harry and Ron huddled over a similar jar in the courtyard. It hadn't been Lily's flame that inspired her to make the bluebell flame. She'd lied to him.

"I don't believe you."

"Why not?" She looked up at him like a first year at sorting.

An uneasy feeling crept through him.

"Why don't you want me in your thoughts, Hermione?" Though inside he was filled with rage, his voice came out calmly, too calmly.

"Wh...what?" she stammered.

"You don't want me in your mind. What are you hiding?" A terrible, horrible thought came to him even as the words left his mouth. A thought he didn't want to believe but nagged at him as if it were the truth. It was happening all over again. "It's you and Potter, isn't it? You've been seeing Potter! It's Potter's baby!"

"No!" But she protested too quickly for his liking.

"You lied to me about the flame, Hermione. You've been making them since your first year!"

Her eyes widened in fright. "No..."

"Don't lie to me again!" he bellowed, grasping her shoulders. "Don't you dare!"

She hung her head. "I'm sorry."

"I'm sorry too," he said, and he meant it. But he had no choice. Hermione's cry met his ears as he forced his way into her memories...

AN: Hugs and full-fat lattes with choc sprinkles to my wonderful beta, thanks hun!

Chapter Sixteen

COMPLETE! Hermione knows his secrets, his destiny unfulfilled. Snape sees only desolate dark. But in the tale of love and longing, Lily remembers everything.

All is not as it seems. The world of wizards is full of lies and half-truths.

Over twenty years ago, Severus Snape fell in love with Lily Evans, and he never stopped loving her. His every move, his every thought, is purely for her. And he has only one place, a room, hidden deep under the lake, where he can relax, not worry about whom he is spying on, what he should be saying and doing, where his loyalties lie. Somewhere he can reminisce about his childhood days there with Lily, to allow himself space to grieve.

That though, as with everything else, is about to change.

Using every ounce of his power, every trick ever learned, he gradually gained access to her occluding mind.

Once inside, instead of cleaving an easy path, as he had expected, through the undefended, almost empty chasm a typical teenager's memories Severus found himself in a high, bricked alleyway, his progress blocked on all sides by an invisible, whispering wall. Only his stoical mastery of Legilimency gained the impossible inches through the wall, toward the myriad of veiled memories that whispered all around him, but he could not see.

Hermione had put up a strong fight, but he was stronger. The wall crumbled, brick-by-brick, and on the other side Severus stepped toward the scene, the memory, he had seen before. Once again he stepped into the school courtyard.

This time, Weasley, Potter and Hermione shuffled closer, shoulder to shoulder. They stared wide-eyed at him, all the time blocking him from seeing the elusive bluebell flame. Hermione's mind, protective of its secrets, had put them there, her friends standing sentry, against him entering her thoughts, against him accessing her memories.

Filled with indignant ire, Severus stepped toward the trio and braced himself, arms folded, legs astride and glared. How dare she use Potter and Weasley to occlude him from her memories! Unless Potter was indeed the one who had made her pregnant. Unless it was him, Harry Potter, who had touched his Hermione!

Furious, he lunged forward at Potter and in doing so forced the memory out of the way. In a swirl of haze, the courtyard vanished.

There was darkness. And from the darkness he heard schoolchildren's voices. They came loudly, like a shout, then hushed to a cacophony of whispering, but excited, children. His own voice, I see no difference, repeated over and over, echoing around him until he shook his head, forcing the voices into silence.

He reacted sharply, raising his hand to shield his eyes as a flash of wand light. Bizarrely, a perfectly levitated feather floated gently to his feet. He did not pick it up. He stood his ground, stoically.

"Legilimens!," he cast again, chanting the incantation over and over again as the feather fox trotted at his feet and around his ankles. "Let me in, little one. I shall not be fooled by your mimicry or enchanted by your trickery."

The feather vanished. Light dipped and swirled around him and he at last snatched at glimpses of memories. They were hazy snippets, out of sequence; covered in white dust, the trio stood terrified in the bathroom having just defeated the Halloween troll; then an older Hermione and Weasley at Potter's bedside; Hermione and Potter wishing Sirius well as he departed from the West Tower on a Hippogriff.

Each time, her memories centred around Potter. Not him, not Severus. Until, through will or want, he saw Hermione's first class with him, ever eagerly waving her hand, desperate to answer the question; Severus kissing her in the cave; Hermione and him making love on the Transfigured bed....

And as her thoughts of him flashed by, her struggle against him lessened. He felt an electric crackle in the air and then, like the calm after a storm, he felt her ease. He sensed her calm.

Fragments of images flickered around him, none staying long enough for him to grasp what they were. Then came the darkness again, filled with voices, violently shouting and screaming. Severus' heart beat faster. He felt the fear, could taste her terror. His need to protect her overwhelmed his logic. These were memories. Memories only, he told himself.

She'd seen such horrors. He'd had no idea. And in his pity, he'd almost lost his concentration. With the metallic taste of blood in his mouth, Severus was knocked onto the floor by someone diving in front on another. There was a momentary flash of eyes, the most terrible, piercing, blood-shot eyes. "Avada Kedavra!" The brilliant flash of green washed away the image.

Then one memory came into sight that sent Severus' mind reeling.

He was in this memory too, but he was younger. A teenager. It was one of the hallways in the castle, and Lily stood before him. She tried to kiss his image, but he shoved her away. No, that wasn't Lily. He remembered now, it had been...

"Rose!" Severus mouthed the name as his younger self hissed it. He watched as young Severus pushed Rose to the ground. He remembered just how much she revolted him. "Get off me!"

"What does it matter who I am?" Rose retorted, with a smirk. "I look like her, don't I?"

"You could never be her!" young Severus bellowed, looking down at her in disgust.

"I could," Rose said with a smirk. "I could do far more for you, Severus, than she does."

The shock of seeing Rose jolted Severus once more from his concentration, and this time the lapse proved fatal. Hermione gained the upper hand. In a violent surge, she succeeded in forcing him from her mind.

Then vision was gone as quickly as it had come, and he was in the tent, lying on his back, staring up at a terrified Hermione. She was cowering on the bunk bed, backed up against the wall of the tent as far away from him as she could get.

Severus just stared at her, the memory playing over and over in his mind.

Then realisation gripped him so tightly it almost strangled him. His fists clenched in anger. "You're her!"

"What...what?!"

"You heard me!" he bellowed, pulling his wand on her. "You're... you're Rose!"

"But..." Hermione stammered. Her eyes fixated on his wand pointed right at her face.

"You tricked me, tricked me to get what you always wanted! You disgust me, you always did! Rose bloody Evans. I can hardly believe it's you. I don't know how you survived, and frankly, I don't care!" His voice had risen in a mixture of despair and grief. "To think I considered my biggest problem to be your love for Harry Potter. How wrong was I?"

"I do love him," Hermione replied quickly. "How could I not?"

"What?" Her statement threw him from his anger for a moment.

"Of course I love him, Severus." She took an emboldened step toward him. Her eyes implored him to understand. "I'd do anything for Harry, even put up with your tirade. Severus, Harry... he's my nephew."

"You think I don't know that?" Severus looked at her, really looked at her. "Rose Evans loved no one but herself and wouldn't do anything for anyone, especially not a member of her family, or her " He could hardly say the word, his mouth had become unbearably dry. His throat contracted as shiver caught his spine. "Or her twin."

Hermione's face was unfathomable. She opened her mouth to speak, but he could not bear to hear her explanation. Instead, he closed the gap between them, and held her shoulders firmly. Their eyes locked.

But he reached for her before she could speak. "Deny me nothing."

"I never wanted to, Severus," Hermione said, *Rose said*, her sweet breath warm against his cheek. How he loved her, how he wanted her. To do this was to lose her, to lose everything he held dear. But to do this was to gain all, if what he believed was true. He held his Hermione in his arms one final time and the pain swelled in his chest, the tears stung at the back of his eyes.

He loved her, he hated her. She'd hurt him and this was exactly how he promised he would never be hurt again, she'd stabbed his heart with her treachery. She was no longer Hermione. He must be ice to her, stone and ice. And if she was looking for his pity; she wasn't going to get it. "You're a stupid little bitch, Rose Evans!"

"Stop it! Just stop it! Don't talk about my sister that way!" Hermione pulled her hand free and clapped it over her mouth.

"What?"

"She died saving me, Severus."

Time seemed to stop as Severus contemplated what she had said.

"Lily?" he asked quietly, searching her face, looking for the answer.

Hermione hung her head. "Yes."

She couldn't be Lily. Lily was dead. This was just another one of Rose's tricks. He pushed her away as if she burned him. "I don't believe you!"

"I don't blame you." Tears spilt down Hermione's cheeks as she watched him.

Severus paced the room, rubbing irritably at the bridge of his nose, squeezing his eyes shut, trying to process all this information. It was too much. "Lily would never do this to me, she would never..."

"I'm sorry, Sev. Truly, I am! I had no choice I.... Please, just look.... You'll see! Quickly, before Harry comes back."

Severus scoured the room, wondering where the trap lay. He expected at any moment to be ambushed by Death Eaters, but there was no one there.

It didn't matter anyway. His entire world had just shattered. If they were to kill him while he was in her thoughts...whoever she was... it wouldn't matter one bit.

With immense force, driven by anger and confusion, he dove back into her memories...

He was in Dumbledore's office, the ex-Headmaster sat at his desk looking up in shock at the red-haired woman before him, a squirming baby held tightly in her arms.

"Professor, I need your help. I need it now!" the woman begged.

"What on earth... I ... they said you were dead! They said the Dark Mark was over your house!" Dumbledore's fingers lingered on the wand on his desk.

The woman was near hysterical. "You have to save Harry, Professor, you have to!"

"Lily?!" Dumbledore said, looking stunned.

"Yes, Lily. I need your help, I need it now. Please!"

Albus raised one intrigued eyebrow.

"Harry isn't my son, sir. He's James and my sister's, Rose's. I...it doesn't matter right now! And I don't know why I'm alive. I don't know why Harry is. Voldemort tried to kill us both, he killed Rose, she stepped in front of me, stopping him from killing me...."

Dumbledore sat quietly before asking, "And you tried to stop him from killing Harry."

Lily nodded.

"How interesting. How very interesting. It appears that your sister's act of sacrifice out of love for you and your own for Harry, somehow blocked his spell. It is with deep regret that I must attest that Tom has never known love, never experienced its power, and that is what destroyed him. Love."

Lily looked at him for a moment, as if in contemplation, then sudden urgency. "I have to get out of here. And I need to take Harry. They'll never leave him alone, never!" Lily said shrilly.

"But Lord Voldemort is gone," Albus said calmly.

"Do you know that? Do you know that for sure?" She was almost begging him.

Albus was silent.

"You're right," the Headmaster replied. "Harry must be placed somewhere safe. At least, temporarily."

"No one can know about me, or that I've been here, no one can know I'm alive! It's not safe, not safe for Harry. I'm trusting you, Albus...." Harry wriggled in her arms, and after battling with him for a moment, she reluctantly placed him on the office floor to let him crawl around.

"Lily, shush. Calm down, dear. You have my complete confidence." He sat there for a moment in silence. "You stay here. And drink this," he said, summoning up a cup of tea for her. "It will help calm you. I will be back as soon as I can. I need to make some arrangements."

Dumbledore left the office. Lily relaxed. "It's all right, Harry," she said to the boy as he fiddled with the drawer handles on Dumbledore's desk, "Albus is a good man, he will find a way to keep us safe. He'll figure out a solution to it all."

Baby Harry gurgled and a small smile crept onto Lily's face. "Everything will be fine."

Time past. How much time, Severus wasn't sure. Harry played with and then discarded a silvery instrument he'd pulled down from one of the Headmaster's occasional tables while Lily, hitching dry sobs, mechanically chocked down the tea. She was so engaged in her own thoughts, she did not hear it when the door creaked open.

"Professor...?" Though much younger, there was no denying who the golden haired boy with the sparkling white smile was standing in the doorway. Gilderoy Lockhart.

"Dumbledore is out," Lily said dismissively, taking the quill Harry had pulled from the Headmaster's desk from his chubby hands.

"Oh," Gilderoy replied, but he made no move to leave. In fact, he walked into the office and began inspecting various objects. "You're Lily Evans."

"No, I'm Rose Evans, Lily's sister, and if you don't mind, I've got some things to work through."

"Oh, well, I've learnt this new spell, wanted to show Dumbledore, but you'll do," Lockhart began, pulling his wand from his robes. "See, it's to make people invisible." He withdrew his wand with an uncanny flourish. "Prepare to be impressed!"

"No!" Lily cried, but she was too late. She might have been able to fight off Death Eaters and even Voldemort himself, but she was no match for the insatiable bravado of Gilderoy Lockhart.

"Rimpskey-bimskey deco-dundrum!"

And as a brilliant stream of purple light hit her square in the face, Lily Evans vanished from Dumbledore's office.

An older looking Dumbledore looked up from his desk, and to say he looked surprised would be a gross understatement.

"Lily! What are you doing here?" Dumbledore asked.

"What...what happened to you?" Lily stammered, staring at Dumbledore. "You're so old!" Her hands clapped over her mouth the moment the words left.

"Nothing has happened to me other than ten years have passed, dear. I'm far more interested in how a decade can go by with no sightings of you and here you are, standing in my office, looking precisely as you did the day you brought Harry to me."

"What?" Lily stared at the Headmaster. "But...oh! That ridiculous boy...Lockhart, he came in here, hit me with a spell.... You mean to say ten years have past?"

"Gilderoy Lockhart?" Albus said, then chuckled. "Never was very good with his wand. But he's not a boy any more. The last I heard he was off banishing Banshees and being quite famous."

Lily sunk down in the chair opposite the Headmaster. "So...?" Lily asked hesitantly. "Harry... how is he?"

Dumbledore smiled. "Harry is just fine. He'll be here at Hogwarts any day now. He's with your sister."

"Rose?" The confusion on Lily's face was evident.

"No, Petunia," Dumbledore said softly.

"And Petunia, she's looked after him?"

Dumbledore paused thoughtfully. "She's provided adequately for him."

Lily sighed with relief. "And they still live at Privet Drive?" Lily asked, jumping to her feet.

"Now, hold on," Albus said softly, his voice bringing her to a halt. "You can't go rushing off to see him, Lily. Firstly, everyone thinks your dead."

"But...."

"When you disappeared from my office, I'm afraid I feared the worst. I thought it best for all concerned if they just went on believing you had perished at Godric's Hollow. I placed Harry back there, I had Hagrid go and 'rescue' him. Perhaps not the best plan, but it certainly kept all questions out the limelight. And Harry's parents' reputation in a reputable state."

"Okay, so we tell everyone it was a mistake, I'm alive..." she began rambling.

Dumbledore stopped her with just one look. "There's been mutterings of late. Murmurs that make me nervous, Lily."

"What murmurs?" she dared to ask, her voice rising in pitch.

"I have word that Voldemort is back, not very powerful, but back all the same."

"But he just vanished!" Lily protested.

"No, he just vanished for you. It's been ten years..."

Lily sighed. "So now what?"

Dumbledore rubbed at his beard. "I have a plan, one that would place you next to Harry, right at his side should trouble come to call. It would seem Lockhart's spell casting incompetence might just be one very helpful mistake."

"That's them?" Lily asked, staring down the corridor at the couple sitting on hard stools in the hospital waiting room. The woman was sobbing, her husband holding her tight.

"Yes. Judith and Frank Granger. Their eleven-year-old daughter was just taken from them."

"What...What happened?" Lily asked tentatively.

"She was on her way home from Muggle school. She never stood a chance against the car of the drunken driver." Dumbledore looked genuinely sad for them. "With some memory modification we could spare them the grief."

Lily watched the couple quietly for a few minutes. "Let's do it."

"We can't use that!" Lily protested, staring wide eyed at Dumbledore. "It's Dark magic!"

"Desperate times call for desperate measures, dear."

Lily looked down and Severus saw an old, blackened book sitting on the desk before them.

"And you really think I can keep Harry safe?" Lily asked.

"Petunia has provided Harry protection these past ten years, simply because she is Rose's sister. I believe you will do the same."

Lily continued to stare at the book. "All right."

Severus watched on as Dumbledore and Lily cast glamour spell after glamour spell, until, instead of Lily standing in the Headmaster's office, there stood a young Hermione Granger, in all her fluffy haired, big-toothed glory.

"There's something I should tell you, Lily," Dumbledore said after they'd finished admiring their work.

"Yes?"

"Severus. He's here at the castle. He's teaching Potions."

Lily whirled on Dumbledore, her eyes wide. "Severus is alive?"

"Yes."

"But...but...he's working for Voldemort!"

"Severus has changed his ways. He's now working for the Order," Dumbledore told her.

Lily clasped her hands to her mouth, to Hermione's mouth. "I have to talk to him...."

"No!" Dumbledore's reply was crisp. "Though Severus might be working for the Order, he is still a Death Eater."

"You don't trust him."

"I trust him under the current circumstances to do what is best for Harry. If he were to know we have lied to him...."

Severus pulled back out of Lily's mind. He was numb. In the matter of a few short minutes, his entire world had shattered. Everything he believed in, everything he had worked for, was a lie.

"Sev?" Lily's voice came out tentatively.

He looked at her, at Hermione. No wonder he'd felt such a strong connection with Miss Granger, no wonder their relationship had fallen together so easily. It was his Lily, the Lily he'd loved for almost his entire life.

And she'd lied to him.

"I'm sorry."

Her words repulsed him. "Sorry? Sorry! Sixteen years without a word and all you have to say is sorry?! How could you do this? How could you do this to me?!"

Lily's face changed to one of anger. "Oh, yes, and you've been a bloody angel, Sev. Joining Voldemort, practically handing him Harry on a platter. He was just a baby, for Merlin's sake!!"

"I've spent the last sixteen years doing everything I could to undo that! And all for you and here I find you're alive and well and haven't even bothered tell me. I've rescued your son... nephew...whatever...so many times... and here you are...."

Tears pricked at his eyes.

Lily saw them, she must have. She reached out to touch his cheek, but he knocked her hand away.

"You lied to me, Lily Evans. And if Albus Dumbledore wasn't already dead, I'd kill him!"

He turned on his heel and stalked out of the tent.

Chapter Seventeen

Chapter 17 of 18

COMPLETE! Hermione knows his secrets, his destiny unfulfilled. Snape sees only desolate dark. But in the tale of love and longing, Lily remembers everything.

All is not as it seems. The world of wizards is full of lies and half-truths.

Over twenty years ago, Severus Snape fell in love with Lily Evans, and he never stopped loving her. His every move, his every thought, is purely for her. And he has only one place, a room, hidden deep under the lake, where he can relax, not worry about whom he is spying on, what he should be saying and doing, where his loyalties lie. Somewhere he can reminisce about his childhood days there with Lily, to allow himself space to grieve.

That though, as with everything else, is about to change.

Severus watched as the pool of ink flowed from the end of his quill, growing larger and larger. The edges of the blot weaving like spider's webs across the parchment. He watched, but he didn't register it. His mind was preoccupied.

Preoccupied with Lily.

Lily. She was alive.

He should have been overjoyed. He was. In a way.

But he felt so betrayed. All these years spent fighting for the Order in her memory, and it had been a lie. She had been alive.

He shifted in the Headmaster's chair. In his chair. He felt like a fraud.

All this time he'd fought in the name of Lily, at least that's what he'd told himself, what he'd told Dumbledore, yet now he had her back and he was hiding away in the castle. She was pregnant with his child, for Merlin's sake! It was his dream to have Lily, to have a family with her, and though the setting might not be ideal, he had what he most desired and here he was behaving childishly. The war was on; who knew how long they might have left together?

Bringing his hand up to rub at the bridge of his nose in frustration, the back of his hand caught the bottle of ink, spilling it over the desk. He stared at the mess for a moment before registering what had happened.

"Crap." Grabbing at the bottle, he righted it. With a swish of his wand, he cleared the mess from the desk.

"It would seem," Phineas Nigellus' portrait said, "that our new Headmaster is a little distracted."

"I thought you were sleeping," Severus growled.

"It looks as if you have been. On your quill."

Severus' brow furrowed in confusion before he caught sight of his fingers, gripped tightly around his wand, stained with ink, dark blotches marring the wood as well.

He growled and flicked the stains away with his wand.

"Wonderful camouflage on your face too, Headmaster, but I would have thought, being such an almighty wizard and all, that you could have come up with something better."

Severus glanced in the mirror across the room and saw ink smeared across his nose where he'd touched it. He cleaned that away as well with an angry swish-and-flick. "Will you go away?"

"I thought you'd like to know I can see Potter, Weasley and the Mudblood again."

"Don't call her that!"

The portrait shrugged. "You know, for a Slytherin, you're turning soft." Severus bristled. Phineas' tone always made him want to reach into the former Headmaster's portrait and strangle him if he could.

"And you know I have a bottle of turpentine in my stores."

"That's not very nice."

"I'm not very nice. What are they doing?"

"Potter and the Weasley boy are asleep. The Mud...Granger is lying in her bed staring at the ceiling. Very productive."

"Is she...are they okay?"

"They would seem to be."

Severus bit his lip. "I want to talk to her."

"After threatening me with turps you think I'm going to relay messages for you?" the portrait said huffily.

"Tell me, Phineas, are you not bound to dutifully carry out any task the current Headmaster sets you?"

"Well...."

"And if I were to swear you to secrecy...."

Phineas perked up at this. "I think you could not even begin to believe what has transpired in this office, of untold secrets sealed within the sprawling fissures of my oil-painted canvas. My lips, sir, are figuratively, as well as literally, sealed." Phineas gave a low, sweeping bow. "I am at your bidding."

"Then get Hermione's attention. Tell her I want to talk to her."

Phineas disappeared for a moment before returning.

"Job done. May I retire, may I sleep now?"

Severus ignored him. "Tell her... tell her I understand. That I'm sorry." Severus paused, feeling ill at ease conveying his next message to Phineas. "That I love her."

Phineas raised one eyebrow. "I was wrong, you've not gone soft. You've gone mad! She's a Mud..."

"Just do it!" Severus barked.

Phineas looked sceptical, but he vanished from his frame again.

Severus waited nervously, fidgeting with his fingers. What if she didn't want him any more? He'd left her walked out on her and their child.

After what seemed like an eternity, the arrogant ex-Headmaster returned.

"She's blubbing like a baby. She says she's sorry for everything. And," Phineas pulled a face like there was a distasteful smell in the air, "that she loves you, too."

Relief washed over Severus. She forgave him! He could have leapt from his seat and danced for joy if Phineas hadn't been watching. He felt so light, so ecstatic. Lily was his!

"Tell her no wonder she was such a know-it-all! And the bluebell flames..." Severus spoke with bubbling relief.

Phineas returned. "She says she wonders why you didn't figure it out earlier. She looks a little sheepish, and a little amused. And she wants to know what will happen now."

Severus welled inside. "Tell her we'll make it. That when this is all over we'll do this right. Tell her... tell her I want to marry her."

"You have to be joking," Phineas replied. "If you think I'm going to propose to some silly little Mud..."

"Do it!" Severus bellowed. Several other portraits opened their eyes at this, but after dozily looking around they nodded back off to sleep.

Phineas wasn't gone long. He sighed deeply on his return. "She said yes."

Severus grinned.

"I don't care what people say, you shouldn't do that. Smiling doesn't help at all."

"I don't know," a voice said from across the room and Severus looked up to find Albus' portrait looking back at him, a twinkle in his eye, "I think it suits him just fine."

Lily's heart thumped loudly in her chest as she snuck into the Shrieking Shack with Ron and Harry. Memories of her last time here, her time with Severus, came flooding back, the feelings it brought overwhelming her. And now he'd asked her to marry him! But it wasn't all plain sailing there was still a war on.

And when she saw Severus standing off with Voldemort between the small crack that allowed them to see into the room, fear set in.

"It cannot be any other way," said Voldemort. "I must master the wand, Severus. Master the wand, and I master Potter at last."

Nagini's cage rolled through the air under Voldemort's power, encompassing Severus' head and shoulders, entrapping him with the serpent. Severus yelled out, the terror in his voice chilling Lily to the bone.

Voldemort spoke in Parseltongue, but Lily had no doubts as to what he had just commanded the snake to do.

"Kill!"

Lily let out a silent, strangled scream. She was trapped, helpless to help him, hidden in the shadows of the tunnel from the Whomping Willow, squashed behind Harry and Ron. She tried to shove Harry out of the way, tried to force her way passed to go to Severus, but Harry, stronger than her and so engrossed in the scene, didn't budge. Lily had no choice but to simply stand there and watch as Severus, the love of her life, slowly drained of life.

"I regret it," Voldemort said coldly. Lily saw his face as he turned to leave; no remorse, no sadness. The cage lifted from around Severus and Voldemort swept from the room, the great serpent floating after him in its protective sphere.

Lily saw Severus' foot tremble. She shoved at Harry, trying to get past him to help, but Harry seemed frozen to the spot.

"Harry!" Lily breathed from behind him, but Harry had finally begun to move. He pointed his wand at the crate that blocked the doorway and lifted it out of the way. Lily had to wait for first Harry and then Ron to clamber into the room before she could get in there.

And what she saw the moment she entered the room froze her in her steps. Snape's face was white, his bloodied fingers held the serpent key, the key to their secret chamber under the lake. He clutched at the front of Harry's robes. Lily watched as he pulled Harry down closer and, with the last of his strength, tried to pass him the key.

The most terrible rasping noise gurgled from Snape's throat. "Take... it... Take ...it..."

Lily saw the silvery wisps of Severus' memories gushing from his mouth, his eyes, his ears. In a panic, Lily conjured up a flask, shoving it at Harry.

"Look... at... me," Severus whispered to Harry.

And Lily saw his eyes empty of life, become the black, empty pools she'd seen when he'd become a Death Eater. He was gone. The key, its chain entwined in his limp fist, thumped tonelessly against the wooden floor.

She couldn't cry. She couldn't do anything. She was completely numb.

Time passed, she had no idea how much.

Voldemort's voice broke through the silence. "You have fought," said the high, cold voice, "valiantly. Lord Voldemort knows how to value bravery."

Lily heard as he taunted Harry, taunted him with the deaths of his friends, with more of them to die if Harry didn't meet Voldemort's demands.

Lily's eyes bulged, and she shook her head frantically at Harry.

"Don't listen to him," said Ron.

"It'll be all right," Lily pleaded desperately. She couldn't let him go off on his own to face Voldemort, not after all these years. "Let's let's get back to the castle, if he's gone to the Forest we'll need to think of a new plan"

Lily gave Severus' body one last look. He was gone. She might as well have been. But for now, she needed to worry about Harry. She owed Severus that much; he'd sacrificed his own life to save her nephew.

Lily frantically searched through the castle. Harry had gone! One moment he was there in the Great Hall with everyone else, the next he'd vanished.

"Neville!" Lily cried, grabbing the boy by his arms. "Have you seen Harry?"

"Well, yeah. He said the oddest thing. He told me if you and Ron were busy I had to kill the snake."

Lily's mind raced. That could only mean one thing Harry wasn't planning on returning to defeat Nagini himself.

"Where was he when you saw him?"

"Out in the grounds. Why?"

"I saw him coming out of the Dumbledore's... Snape's office a while ago," Luna piped up from behind Neville.

Lily bit her lip. Then, without a word, she scurried off to the Headmaster's office.

She stood before the stone gargoyle. What would the password be? Why hadn't she asked Severus...before?

Then it hit her. "James Potter is an arrogant toerag."

The gargoyle slid aside and Lily belted up the spiral staircase.

She wasn't surprised to see the silvery liquid swirling in the Pensieve on the desk. Without a second thought, she shoved her face into the contents.

Scene after scene from Severus' memories flashed by. In any other circumstances Lily would have enjoyed watching them as children, but she was searching for something. A clue as to why Harry would run off on his own.

Finally, her question was answered.

Dumbledore took a deep breath and closed his eyes. "Tell him that on the night Lord Voldemort tried to kill him, when Lily cast her own life between them as a shield, the Killing Curse rebounded upon Lord Voldemort, and a fragment of Voldemort's soul was blasted apart from the whole, and latched itself onto the only living soul left in the collapsing building. Part of Lord Voldemort lives inside Harry, and it is that which give him the power of speech with snakes, and a connection with Lord Voldemort's mind that he has never understood. And while that fragment of soul, unmissed by Voldemort, remains attached to, and protected by Harry, Lord Voldemort cannot die."

"So the boy... the boy must die?" Snape asked, calmly. Too calmly.

"And Voldemort himself must do it, Severus. That is essential."

Severus was silent for a long time. "I thought...all these years... that we were protecting him for her. For Lily."

"We have protected him because it has been essential to teach him, to raise him, to let him try his strength. Meanwhile, the connection between them grows ever stronger, a parasitic growth: sometimes I have thought he suspects it himself. If I know him, he will have arranged matters so that when he does set out to meet his death, it will, truly, mean the end of Voldemort."

Lily pulled herself out of the Pensieve. She'd heard enough. She couldn't go with Harry, she would be of no use to him.

He would die.

Severus was dead.

Severus.

Finally the grief hit her. Her Severus was dead.

She barely remembered the journey back to the Shrieking Shack.

His body lay on the dusty wooden floor, pale and lifeless, his dark eyes now completely empty.

She fell to the ground next to him, pressed her head against his silent chest and wept.

She couldn't leave him here, leave him in the dust. Summoning all her strength she rose to her feet and levitated his body out of the Shrieking Shack.

As she came out from under the Whomping Willow her foot connected with a dull thud against something bulky lying in the grass. Looking down she found Ronald Weasley, staring up at the night sky with the same empty look as Severus' eyes held.

"No!" she screamed. Not Ron as well!

She fell to her knees again. Harry was sacrificing himself. Ron was dead. Her Severus was dead. There was nothing left.

Without her concentration, Severus' body drifted down to the earth beside Ron.

Her heart hurt so much she couldn't cry, she could do nothing but stare at the two of them, to try and wish away this nightmare. But it was all too real. Their faces were both ashen. They were gone.

Finally, she began to weep. Great sobs racked through her entire body, right to her core.

In the distance, in what seemed another lifetime, she could hear the commotion in the forest. Harry and Voldemort. She tried to block it out; she couldn't listen to her nephew die as well.

"Why?!" she screamed. "All of you, it's your fault!" she bellowed at their bodies. "So bloody selfish! Ronald, you should never have come back you're just a kid! You should have stayed with your parents... nobody asked you to do this, nobody expected you to!" She hit the ground next to him with her fist in frustration, not feeling the pain. "And Severus an entire life spent spying for one side or another...and this is the thanks you get. Lies upon lies and betrayal upon betrayal!"

Tears spilled down her cheeks as she cradled Severus head in her lap, stroking his hair. "I love you. I have always loved you. I will always love you." She ran her fingers over the cooling skin of his forehead. "I'd do anything to be able to tell you that, anything."

The air around Lily crackled with electricity. The quiver of magic in the air knocked her from her sorrow. Tiny lightening bolts glimmered in the air, then seemingly of it's own accord, as if possessed, her wand arm lifted. Incantation after incantation flowed from her lips, and at first Lily didn't recognise them. Then, a memory of years ago, a memory from Dumbledore's office. A memory of becoming Hermione.

All the spells hit Severus in his chest, each one jolting his body as if he'd electrocuted. Each blue bolt darted across his body, down his right arm to spark at his fingertips.

A silver glint caught Lily's eye in between the bursts of light. The Slytherin serpent key was still clutched in his hand.

Before Lily's eyes, Severus body shimmered. His nose began to shrink, his hair grew coarser. Lily moved back a step, frightened. It was then she saw Ron's body fill with light. As she watched on it began to wilt, his limbs curling up, his body became more and more opaque. Finally, it melted away into the ground.

Lily reached out to touch the earth where he had lain, but felt nothing but damp soil.

"No, no, no!" she said, shaking her head in horror. She didn't know what was happening, she'd never even read about anything like this.

A horrible gurgling noise came from Severus, and Lily's eyes shot back to him. His hair was becoming lighter, his body filling out a little....

He no longer looked like Severus. Now a rasping Ronald Weasley lay in his place, his body jerking. Suddenly he sat bolt upright, his eyes wide open, staring up in terror.

"Sev....Severus?" Lily asked cautiously.

"Lily." His voice came out in a gravelly rasp. He collapsed back onto the ground, gasping for breath.

"Severus!" she cried out, wrapping her arms around him and holding him tightly, so tightly in case he should disappear again. She couldn't say how long she lay there for, refusing to let go. She listened to his chest as his breathing became easier, as his heart slowed to a normal pace.

"Am I alive?"

His voice was barely more than a whisper, but it reverberated through his chest into Lily's ears.

"Yes," Lily said, sitting up to look at him. Her eyes were filled with tears, but there was a smile on her lips. "Yes, Severus, you're alive."

He struggled to sit up, and with Lily's help, he finally made it. Confusion furrowed his brow.

"What's wrong?" Lily asked desperately.

"Something feels...different."

Lily could have laughed out loud if she hadn't been crying so hard with happiness at his return. Unable to form any more words, so choked up with emotion, she conjured up a mirror and held it before his face.

Severus looked at his image, tilting his head from side to side. "As much as I appreciate you saving my life," Severus spoke, his still raspy voice held a hint of amusement, "couldn't you have chosen someone other than a Weasley?"

Lily tried to laugh, but her eyes drifted back to where Ron's body had vanished. "I shouldn't have been so hard on him he was just a kid."

"So were we, Lily," Severus said quietly, his hand taking hers.

Lily turned back to him. "I..." She choked on the words, unable to get them out.

"I love you," Severus told her, his eyes meeting hers.

She swallowed the lump in her throat and nodded. "I love you too, Severus. Always."

AN: Huge hugs and thanks to my most wonderful beta! Just the epilogue to go, hun, and then we're done :D

Disclaimer: I nicked bits of this chapter directly from Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows. No infringement intended, just wanted to have some fun :D

Epilogue

Chapter 18 of 18

COMPLETE! Hermione knows his secrets, his destiny unfulfilled. Snape sees only desolate dark. But in the tale of love and longing, Lily remembers everything.

All is not as it seems. The world of wizards is full of lies and half-truths.

Over twenty years ago, Severus Snape fell in love with Lily Evans, and he never stopped loving her. His every move, his every thought, is purely for her. And he has only one place, a room, hidden deep under the lake, where he can relax, not worry about whom he is spying on, what he should be saying and doing, where his loyalties lie. Somewhere he can reminisce about his childhood days there with Lily, to allow himself space to grieve.

That though, as with everything else, is about to change.

Nineteen years later...

"Come on, honestly!" Lily called to her husband. "We're going to be late for the Express!"

"Yeah, yeah," he muttered, making his way down the toy-littered hallway, a large, wooden trunk floating in the air before him. She had to admit, even after all these years, it was hard to get used to seeing Ron's form donned head to toe in black. People whispered at first, questioned Lily about it. She had simply rolled her eyes at them and said Ron thought it looked sophisticated.

"I swear, Lil," he whispered as he passed her, "I don't know how I let you talk me into more children at my age. I mean, we've only just got rid of Billius, Rose is finally off to Hogwarts, and we've still got two years left of Hugo's pleasant company."

"Think of it as a peaceful retirement," Lily told him with a laugh.

"I suppose it's better than being shipped off to St Mungo's...marginally," Severus commented.

Yes, it was better than St Mungo's, Lily thought with a smile. That summed it up nicely.

"Time to get moving. Molly's going to meet us at King's Cross. And you know what she's like!"

"I think my ears are still ringing from when she found out you were expecting Billius," Severus replied with a nod. "Though her son breezing through his Newts did seem to lessen her ire."

Lily smiled. Though the memory of Ron still stung, she was glad the Weasleys' had been spared his loss.

And Severus was happy. He'd declined the offer of a position as Potions Master, deciding instead to devote his time to his wife and playing Keeper for the Chudley Cannons. He said he had never been happier, even when his career came to an abrupt halt after the first match. Severus apparently held nothing on Ron's Quidditch abilities.

Lily devoted her time to her husband and raising their three children. When their daughter was born, with emerald eyes and flame-red hair, it was Severus who leaned down and whispered 'Rose' to her. He was right, the name was the perfect tribute to the bravest sister anyone could wish for.

Lily picked up her wedding ring from the bench where she had placed it while preparing the never-ending supply of Pepper-Up Potion the bulging 'Granger-Weasley' household seemed to consume. She fingered the band, running the tip of one finger over the engraving on the inside.

Love will conquer all.

She smiled.

Her heart had not pained Lily for nineteen years. All was well.

The End.

AN: That's it folks! I hope you all enjoyed it and thanks for sticking with me :)

My sincerest thanks to my wonderful beta for the last few months of hell...I mean fun! *hugs*

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