

Requiem for a Lost Boy

by LadyTuesday

Dead. Severus Snape is dead. But now, he has the most important choice to make,
and a green-eyed doe comes to guide him.

Epitaph

Chapter 1 of 1

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In case you missed it in the summary ... *** WARNING - DEATHLY HALLOWS SPOILER ALERT! *** IF YOU HAVEN'T READ/FINISHED DEATHLY HALLOWS, STOP
HERE!

That done, on to my A/N:

Much like many of you Harry Potter fans here and at many other sites, I have been mourning the loss of the resident bat of Hogwarts, Severus Snape. The snarky Potions master we all love to hate was one of my favorite characters from the get-go; mostly because I KNEW that there was more to him, that he was a hero in disguise. Ever since Deathly Hallows, I've been contemplating just what kind of hero he was.

Also, since Deathly Hallows, I've had this plot bunny chasing around my head like it's on speed. I didn't cry when Severus Snape died; I didn't cry during The Prince's Tale (I think I was too stunned to cry). When I DID cry was the moment that Harry, heading to his death, compared himself to Voldemort and Snape, calling them the "abandoned boys" who had only found home at Hogwarts. That got me. I could think of nothing but the Lost Boys of Peter Pan, who ran away from their mothers because they didn't want to grow up. After reading that, I could only think of Snape: caught between child and man, dark and light, evil and good ... striving to pull away from the one, but never quite reaching the other. Heartwrenching.

And then came this piece. I needed closure, and I think he did as well. So here are his last moments, LadyTuesday style.

Requiem in pace aeternum.

Requiem for a Lost Boy

The floor was cold. Or perhaps it was him that was cold. Whichever the case, it seemed as if both floor and body were cubes of ice, each trying their hardest not to melt. But there was a core of warmth within him that refused to dispel, so millimeter by millimeter, he thawed. He couldn't explain why he wanted to stay there on the cold stones, but something in him dreaded the awakening. And then awareness returned to his body. He was naked, sprawled on the smooth yet chilly floor of a building obviously flooded with light, if the red-orange glow of his eyelids were any indication. He opened them.

With the force of a stampeding herd of hippogriffs, the misty brightness of his surroundings assaulted his eyes. He could barely raise his head, but when he did, panic seized him. Without really knowing why, his fingers groped over the side of his neck, searching for something he couldn't seem to find. There was no blood. And yet, he couldn't reason why he'd been positive there *would* be blood. Lots of it, and all his. He hauled himself to his knees on the cold stone. No blood on the floor either. And, again, his fingers probed his neck. No blood and no punctures, just two small raised circles that felt like old mosquito bites. The only trademark of what he was sure should have been gaping holes. And then memory pelted him so quickly he actually staggered back to his rear on the floor. Voldemort ... the snake ... Potter and his memories...!

But that meant he was...

Dead. Severus Snape was dead.

"But how can that be?" he muttered to himself as he staggered to his feet. "I ... I am ... and yet, I'm ... Where am I?" The grimace that had been etched into his face over the years settled back into the familiar lines. The unforgiving Potions master did not take favorably to being bamboozled.

He swore roundly as he stubbed his toe on a statue, a bit puzzled that he wasn't wearing shoes. Or anything else, for that matter. As soon as the thought had occurred to him, though, he was naked no longer. He patted his chest and thighs absently, half-smiling and half-scowling at the scratchy, familiar yards of ebony wool that hung from his broad shoulders; these, he remembered. He'd worn them since...

"Sev!"

That this voice should be here, ambushing him now, was agony, and he clutched at his chest as he wheeled in every direction, panicked and searching. Seventeen years had not wiped that voice from his memory. His knees wobbled as he saw her, and only the years that had toughened him allowed Severus Snape to behold her loveliness without dissolving into weeping sobs. She practically galloped down the stairs to him, the pale purple robes she wore shimmering under the arched ceilings lit by stained glass, as if death and decades had never separated them. As if he could place them back before that day at the lake just by looking at her long enough. He hadn't even noticed that the moment he saw her, his clothes had changed. The billowing black robes disappeared, and in their place, a trim pair of black trousers appeared underneath a grey sweater and a plain set of black robes bearing a green and silver Slytherin House crest. A prefect badge glittered at his lapel.

"Lily?" His voice was a hoarse croak. "Lily, how *can* it be...?"

Lily Evans Potter heaved herself into the arms of her childhood best friend, causing him to stumble as he caught her around the middle. After all he'd been through, all he'd done, he allowed himself this moment after all these years: he buried his face in the silken tumble of flamed hair and inhaled deeply. Even in death, she smelled like lavender and vanilla. Horror flooded him when he felt tears wet upon his face.

"Lily," he whispered again, so quiet against her ear that his breath made her shiver.

"Oh, Severus," she said, pulling away and beaming into his face, "how I've missed you all these years, waiting to see you again."

He paused a moment, digested this. "Then I am dead?"

Her smile was a sad sort of thing, but there was only joy in her eyes, even as they glistened with tears. "Yes, Sev. You're all done there."

At this, a lop-sided quirk of his lips that might have been a smile on anyone else. "You make it sound as if living is merely a homework assignment to be done before being allowed out to play."

"In a way," Lily answered, suddenly thoughtful, "though yours seems more to have been one long and grueling examination." Her face clouded for the first time.

"With no right answers," he barked gruffly. But his face softened, almost at once. He knew, without being told, that the soft expression on him was as out of place as the dark one appeared on her.

"It is..." he had to stop and gather himself before continuing, "good to see you again, Lily."

"Oh, I had to come," she said quickly. Then, in answer to his stricken face, "Not required to, Sev, I wanted to come. Dumbledore was going to, but he's," she paused, uncertain, then smiled, "busy with Harry."

Snape's face tightened, a sudden thundercloud, but she continued anyway.

"It *had* to be me, Severus. I *knew* that I was the one who had to come to guide you."

Now, he truly was confused. "Guide me? Where are we going?"

Her smile lit the hallway brighter than any sun could have. He could almost feel the air around them pulse and swell with warmth. "Home, of course."

Severus opened his mouth to speak, but it was only then that the building around him seemed to become clear. He knew this hallway, oh, so very well. The stones underneath his boots were smoothed almost to a polish from over a thousand years of shuffling adolescent feet. Stained glass windows were interspersed with centuries-old tapestries of ancient witches and wizards, illustrating their particular claims to fame. At the end of the hallway, just over Lily's shoulder, he could see the gargoyles that guarded the entrance to the stairway leading up to the Headmaster's office. She threw a glance in the direction of his gaze and then turned her smile on him again.

She held out a hand. "Come, Severus. We're going home."

He had started to put out his own long-fingered hand when it hit him what she was suggesting. He retracted the grip quickly. "I cannot."

Her face showed no surprise, but she cocked her head to one side and asked the question of him anyway. "Why ever not?"

"I am," he started then trailed off. "I believe that I know where that corridor leads, Lily. And I am ... not worthy."

She sighed heavily as she lifted a hand to cup his cheek. "Ever so hard on yourself, Sev?"

Revulsion shook him as he felt his despair paint itself across his features. The years had taught him to shore up the cracks, wall off his mind *and* his heart, but here she stood and he acted as if he were no more than a boy again. A tear slipped from his eye and across her thumb, now gently stroking his cheek. He damned himself for leaning into the caress.

"Not hard enough," he barked out. "I am not worthy of it, Lily. I sacrificed everyone and everything I knew just for power. I have done and said and watched and allowed things that no man should ever consider. I willingly vied for the privilege of being First Mate to the Captain of death!"

"And you spent seventeen years *swimming* back to shore!" she said, her eyes alight with flaming passion.

"My recent dedication does not excuse my past indiscretions." His voice was the hard, smooth silk-covered steel of the Potions master once again. Bat-like black robes fluttered into place at his shoulders.

"When will you stop thinking that your good deeds are insignificant?" She was shouting now.

"When they outnumber the malicious ones," he replied slickly.

And he did not even feel the crack of her hand against his cheek until her fingers had completed their arc and come again to rest at her side. He couldn't stop himself from staring down at her in complete shock.

"If there was ever one thing that marred how I felt for you, Severus, it was your harshness."

He hiccupped unconsciously before steeling his face. He could see her mind working behind her eyes as she decided to let that rest, for the moment.

"Too harsh, Severus; you were always too harsh with yourself." And after a long moment, she dropped her gaze from his for the first time and blushed. "I was too harsh with you."

"No," he said firmly. This time it was his hand at her cheek, raising her eyes. "No, if anything you were not harsh enough. If only I had listened, things might have been different. We could have..." But not even here, not even now could he finish that sentence.

She was quiet as she moved towards him again, lacing her arms around his waist. She rested her head on his chest. Severus fought the jump of his muscles and his betraying heart as it began to race within his chest. But, much to his pride, his arms were steady as he wrapped them around her shoulders.

"You're a good man, Severus," she said, at length. He opened his mouth to protest, but without even seeing it, she knew to cut him off. "You're a *good man*," she said again. "A good man, who just made some poor choices as a teenager. We all do. I did; I should have understood why you..."

He shook his head, his chin creating small whorls in the top of her hair. "You gave me more understanding than anyone should have. You were always so generous to me."

His heart stuck in his throat, a painful lump the size of the castle they were standing in. Something in him tried to speak, but he could only clench his face and fight against the pain lodged solidly just behind her forehead on his chest. Suddenly, her head bounded up and she pushed just far enough out of the circle of his arms to look into his eyes. She searched them deeply and for a mad moment, he thought she was trying to practice Legilimency on him.

"Say it, Severus."

His face was granite and he could not respond.

"Now. Say what it is you would say if you had it to do all over again."

His mouth worked a moment, then stilled. "I cannot. Not now. Not after everything."

"But when better to do it? What do we have to lose?" She could tell from his twisting face that she had not won him over, so she laid out his own trump card. "Tell me you love me, Severus. You wouldn't tell me then..."

"Couldn't..." he interjected gruffly.

She charged on as if he hadn't spoken. "...so tell me now. I *want* to hear it."

The muscles in his face jumped and then settled; he closed his eyes as he opened his lips a scant inch. "I love you, Lily. I've always been in love with you. I think I was born loving you."

He squeezed his eyes shut against the stinging tears begging for release and turned his face away from the hand she had raised to brush away the moistness on his cheeks. His chest shook in a flurry of paroxysms as he stifled sobs.

Her voice was all the quieter. "I love you, too."

Severus's gaze was hard as it locked on her eyes. "Do *not* toy with me now."

Lily returned his stare with the same hard fervor, matching him toe-to-toe. "Why shouldn't it be true? Why can't you believe that I love you?"

"Because you shackled yourself to that goon who made my life hell!" he shouted.

"And you were blameless?" she rocketed back. "We were children when those grudges were formed, Severus, and I'll not have you throw them back at me now! If you believe no other word from my mouth, hear this and know it: I love you, Severus. I always have."

He couldn't escape her gaze. It was as if her eyes had pinioned him with something far more constraining than the coils of the snake that had spelled his end. And in the depths of those clear, green eyes, he saw the truth in her words. Something in him crumbled, snapped, and he fought not to sob. When he allowed his eyes to merely search hers, he mumbled his thoughts without considering the escape of his inner monologue.

"So glad I got to see them again before it all ended," he said with a sigh.

"See what, Sev?" she said, a quiet smile on her lips.

He was trapped by the very thing he spoke of and couldn't force himself to lie. "Your eyes. He has them, you know."

She nodded, needing no explanation. Lily turned and, lacing an arm companionably around his waist, began leading him towards the stairway. "Harry was with you, then? At the end?"

Unable to speak so casually of his own death, Severus merely nodded.

"He's a good boy, you know."

Severus grumbled low in his throat, but at her glare, he nodded again. "He'll ... do his best."

"He won't let you die in vain. He'll show you for the hero you are."

At this he stopped. "I'm no hero. What I have been capable of..." As he realized that they stood at the foot of the Headmaster's staircase, the old tightness regained his face.

Lily stepped onto the first of the stairs, allowing her to gaze down at him. She drew a deep breath, as if preparing to recite a speech she'd had memorized for years. "I've watched Harry closely, Severus. And he has struggled with many ordeals, just like you. And Dumbledore once said something to him that I will say to you: It is not our abilities that define us, Severus, but our choices."

"My choices have made me worthy of nothing but the torment I suffered for seventeen years because of them."

Something shimmered around Severus, and he noticed the hall extend further back behind him than it had before. A strange, greenish light coated the far end of the corridor. In the distance, he heard something rustling and turned to gaze down that direction. The sound tickled his mind and the shrill whine of something like a baby ricocheted off the walls. A shriveled corpse-like figure writhed there, its arms outstretched, beseeching him in a parody of a child's plea for help. Severus could almost hear the high, cold voice in his head, asking for his most trusted Death Eater to aid him now, at his greatest hour of need. Now, to guarantee the Potter boy's death, destroying any chance the boy had of ruining all his plans.

"You've spent the last seventeen years making the toughest choices that could be put in front of any man, Severus." Lily drew his gaze back merely through the strength and conviction in her voice; it was as if he'd never seen that shrunken husk that he was certain was Voldemort ... somehow.

"You've done so much with such difficult situations; you've chosen to offer up your life so many times, just to do the right thing. But you've never chosen to acknowledge your own worth, your own sacrifice. All of the choices you've made *all* of them, Severus that have led towards the light were nothing in comparison with the one ahead of you right now. You have *never* believed yourself worthy of goodness, Severus, and now, you have your one defining choice to make. Trust me, if you were not worthy of the choice, you wouldn't be given one."

He looked over his shoulder suddenly, like a spell had been fired at him from behind. Descending at the far end of the corridor was a staircase that, despite being nowhere near the Headmaster's office in the *real* Hogwarts, he instinctively knew led to the cold and familiar dank gloom of the dungeons. And ahead of him, led the stairway up to the Headmaster's office and into the light. He knew where *Lily* was meant to go She held out her hand again. As if her offer was a signal flare of his choice, a wailing cry sounded from the top of the stairs leading down to the Potions dungeon. Severus felt his face twitch as he fought not to acknowledge it.

"Come, Severus. Come home with me. There isn't much time and now comes your choice. You can walk down that hall, but you've been there before. You can go down where you believe you belong, where you believe you *deserve* to go, or you can choose to come with me and finally acknowledge all you have done. This choice is what will redeem you, Severus. Take what you have earned."

Her hand was soft as it reached to him, but her eyes were piercing. He looked again to the end of the hall and shuddered as his eyes fell upon the shriveled thing as it writhed. He was certain, now, that it was the Dark Lord though how, he couldn't guess and, with a sudden flash of clarity as it wriggled helplessly, he saw Lily's eyes again, only set underneath a cap of dark, unruly hair ... saw those eyes underneath the scar stare down the wriggling thing and turn away. If the boy could do it, why not he? Severus's fingers trembled for the first time in so long as he extended his arm, extended his hand, and allowed her to pull him onto the stairs.

The case lurched as it began to move upwards and, for the first time since he had found himself here, Severus knew fear, shaky and writhing within his belly. It melted away as she turned to him though, a curtain of flames descending around his face as she lowered her face to his. His heart alternately sunk into his feet and leapt into his head, bursting through the top (he was certain it had) to caper around them as her lips touched his. So long had he waited for this moment! A moment of regret that it had not happened when he was alive was brushed away, out of sight. Her hands were on his face, he could feel her lips on his and her tongue chasing his around his mouth; what did he care that it wasn't "real"? What was "real" anyhow?

But he pulled away, roughly, tamping down the joy that was so quick and hot in his veins that he shook with it. "James," he said roughly, panting.

"Shhhh," she replied soothingly, stroking his cheek. "It's all right; it's all right here."

"But ... but, Potter," he murmured again.

"He loves me," she said quietly. "And so do you. I love him; I love you. It's all right now. It's all balanced; do you see?"

And strangely, he honestly felt that he did. Severus pressed up against her lips again, allowing himself to revel in this one moment, sweeter than any he had ever experienced. The mist was descending upon their shoulders as they moved up, up, closer towards the door, dark within the bright, shimmering haze. With a laugh of triumph, Lily threw back the carved mahogany and Severus was showered with light that, for once, did not hurt his eyes that had, so long ago, become accustomed to the dark. And then, behind the mist, they were there: all faces he recognized from life. Lupin and Tonks ... the Weasley boy, Moody ... Black and ... James Potter ... and strangely, they all beamed at him. And in the back, Albus Dumbledore stood, gazing upon him with tears in his eyes, as one would regard a favored son. As Severus stepped over the threshold, something seemed to wash over him and the black of his robes bled like water-color paint until he wore long, flowing yards of a deep, verdant green. A hand through his hair felt ebony locks like watered silk. And then, a deafening noise of applause erupted around him. Severus Snape smiled genuinely for perhaps the first time in his life.

It was all for him.
